Sean V. Leatherbury

Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity

Between Reading and Seeing

IMAGE, TEXT, AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity

Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity considers the Greek and Latin texts inscribed in churches and chapels in the late antique Mediterranean (c. 300–800 CE), compares them to similar texts from pagan, Jewish, and Muslim spaces of worship, and explores how they functioned both textually and visually.

These texts not only recorded the names and prayers of the faithful, but were powerful verbal and visual statements of cultural values and religious beliefs, conveying meaning through their words as well as through their appearances. In fact, the two were intimately connected. All of these texts – Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and pagan – acted visually, embracing their own materiality as mosaic, paint, or carved stone. Colorful and artfully arranged, the inscriptions framed human relationships with the divine, encouraged responses from readers, and made prayers material. In the first in-depth examination of the inscriptions as words and as images, the author reimagines the range of aesthetic, cultural, and religious experiences that were possible in spaces of worship.

Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity is essential reading for those interested in Roman, late antique, and Byzantine material and visual culture, inscriptions and other texts, and religious life in the ancient Mediterranean.

Sean V. Leatherbury is Assistant Professor of Art History at Bowling Green State University, USA, and Research Associate of the European Research Council-funded project *Monumental Art of the Christian and Early Islamic East*, based in the Faculty of Classics at the University of Oxford, UK. His research focuses on Roman and late antique visual and material culture, and examines the relationship between art and text, issues of identity, and the transformation of the so-called minor arts from the Roman to the Byzantine period. His work has been supported by fellowships from the Getty Research Institute, USA, the Bard Graduate Center, USA, and the Council for British Research in the Levant, UK, and by funding from the Association for the Study and Preservation of Roman Mosaics, UK, and the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research, UK. Currently, he is completing a monograph on the late antique floor mosaics of Syria and co-editing a volume on late antique art and local identities.

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Abbreviations

ADAJ	*Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*
AE	*Année Épigraphique*
AG	*Anthologia Graeca*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
AT	*Antiquité Tardive*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BMGS	*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CIG	*Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*
CII	*Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
DACL	*Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907–1953
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
ICUR	*Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*
IGLS	L. Jalabert, R. Mouterde, and J.P. Rey-Coquais, eds., *Inscriptions grecques et latines de Syrie*, Paris: P. Guethner, 1929–
I.Jordanie	P.L. Gatier, *Inscriptions de la Jordanie*, Vol. 2, *Région centrale. IGLS* 21. Paris: P. Guethner, 1986
I.Knidos	W. Blümel, *Die Inschriften von Knidos, IGSK 41*. Bonn: R. Habelt, 1992
ILCV	*Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*
	I.Smyrna G. Petzl, *Die Inschriften von Smyrna*, 2 vols. in 3, *IGSK* 23–4. Bonn: R. Habelt, 1982–1990
JAC	*Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JÖB	*Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*

JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
PBSR	*Papers of the British School at Rome*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*
PL	*Patrologia Latina*
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*
QDAP	*Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine*
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
REG	*Revue des Études Grecques*
RQ	*Römische Quartalschrift*
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*
SGO	R. Merkebach and J. Stauber, *Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Östen*, 5 vols. Leipzig: K.G. Saur Verlag, 1998–2004
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

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1 Introduction

Upon entering the renovated galleries of ancient art at the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut, visitors come face to face with a monumental mosaic from the Church of Ss. Peter and Paul at Gerasa, the city of Jerash in modern-day Jordan **(Color Plate 1)**.[1] Until the recent renovation, the mosaic, which arrived in New Haven in 1932 after it was excavated by the Yale-British School team in the late 1920s, had been backed with reinforced concrete, which was sensitively removed by a team of conservators and replaced with more modern, lightweight materials, allowing the object itself to take pride of place.[2] The six-meter-high mosaic dominates the wall with depictions of the walled cities of Memphis and Alexandria, the latter including its famous *Pharos* (lighthouse), and, at the top, a vase surrounded by vine scrolls. In the center of the panel is a Greek inscription in white tesserae, framed and offset by a brilliant red *tabula ansata* (a "tablet with handles" in the shape of triangles):

> Indeed, each high priest brings very beautiful wonders to the people who inhabit this city and land, wherefore famous Anastasios, teaching faithful beliefs of God, built a house to the first of the apostles, Peter and Paul, for to them the Savior gave power, decorated with ornaments of silver and vividly-colored stones.[3]

As displayed, the mosaic, with its rich combination of text and image – things both to read and to see – is a fitting introduction to the world of late antique visual culture, a work made in a Roman medium, mosaic, for a Christian building.

For the scholar, the work and its display throw into sharp relief the many issues that frame any examination of objects from the period, especially mosaics and inscriptions. The mosaic was originally part of the pavement of a church, a sacred space for Christians of the city, and was placed in front of the sanctuary, where it likely would have been viewed by the clergy (including the donor, Bishop Anastasios, mentioned in the inscription) and members of the congregation (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).[4] These viewers may have looked at and understood the mosaic in different ways as they walked over it before, during, or after the liturgy.[5] The inhabitants of Gerasa, a city with a rich classical past, would most probably have seen the pavement in its local context, as part of a wave of new churches built

Figure 1.1 Church of Ss. Peter and Paul, Gerasa, Jordan, view from the nave looking towards the apse, photograph taken in 2010

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

and decorated with mosaics in the city in the course of the sixth century CE (Common Era), whose decorative programs and dedicatory inscriptions reveal the continued influence of Graeco-Roman artistic and literary traditions.[6] Some viewers, particularly the clergy and other educated elites, may have appreciated the classicizing language of the inscription and recognized the Egyptian cities of Memphis and Alexandria depicted in the mosaic, the former being the capital of Egypt in the Old Kingdom period that continued to be a population hub in the region into the seventh century, including the Monastery of Apa (Father) Jeremias at Saqqara, on the edge of the ancient Memphite cemetery.[7] Some might have even visited these cities, especially Alexandria, a hub of both classical and Christian culture in the period.[8] The floor of the church would have been read with and against the other mosaics of the building, as well as liturgical objects such as lamps, silver vessels, and the vestments of the clergy.[9]

While reconstructing the experience of a sixth-century viewer in the church at Gerasa in all its particulars is of course impossible, we can make inroads towards this goal.[10] We do this by reading, or looking at, artistic and inscriptional ensembles together, evaluating surviving images and inscriptions within their architectural

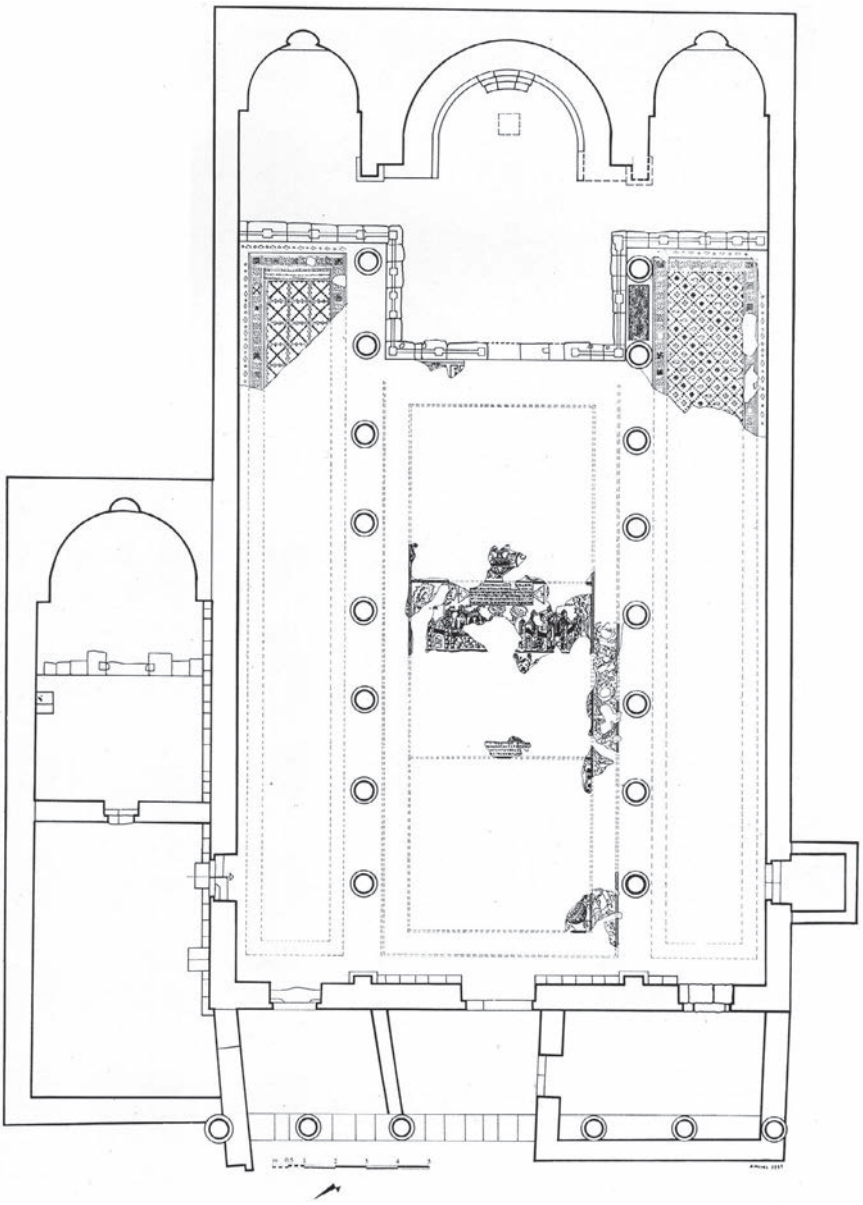

Figure 1.2 Plan, Church of Ss. Peter and Paul, Gerasa

Source: Courtesy of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, Mount Nebo, and the American Center of Oriental Research, Amman

contexts and against information provided by primary literary sources, including biblical exegesis, theological writings, and other genres of literature popular in the period. Certain scholars of late antique art have long been engaged with this relationship between inscribed words and images, but only in the past several decades has the wider community of art historians begun to investigate more deeply the relationship between texts and images.[11] This new sub-field has been approached from a number of angles, as in the volume of essays edited by Liz James, *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, which provides a good view of the scope of recent areas of research and shows how far scholarship has come from its initial interest in ekphrasis (description) alone.[12] Interest in the junctions and disjunctions between art and text has not been limited to the late antique and Byzantine period, and scholars have undertaken similar examinations for the arts of Assyria,[13] Pharaonic Egypt,[14] classical and Hellenistic Greece, imperial Rome,[15] the medieval west,[16] early modern Rome,[17] and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,[18] among other periods. The field is a vibrant one at the moment, as the existence of the series in which this book is published, *Image, Text, and Culture in Classical Antiquity*, testifies, and those working within it have begun to engage with the wide range of verbal and visual potential of texts written into public spaces: thus the recent spate of edited volumes that focus on the role of inscriptions as things to be looked at (art, or "design") as well as read,[19] or as signs of faith, power, and identity.[20]

Recent work has aimed to put inscriptions like that from Gerasa into a more global, trans-temporal context, and has opened up a range of interesting material and visual approaches to the texts, some of which will be echoed here.[21] However, the ability of many recent studies to discuss the range of inscribed texts from the late antique period has been limited by a focus on cross-cultural similarities and differences, which discourages a drilling-down into the rich web of texts produced in the period. The vast majority of studies on late antique inscriptions continue to pay more attention to the messages they convey, and the names, dates, and titles they provide, than to their relationships to the buildings in which they were written.[22] In the realm of late antique epigraphy (the study of words written onto surfaces other than scrolls or the pages of books), summary investigations of the relationship between inscriptions and images, and the visual and physical context of inscriptions, have been undertaken for certain monuments and programs, as well as the literary features of inscriptions written in verse,[23] but the large number of inscriptions which survive from late antique churches, synagogues, and mosques has thus far deterred work on the larger themes that emerge from the texts across regions and religions. Despite the riches of the corpus of mosaic inscriptions, in particular, art historians have been slow on the whole to incorporate the study of these texts into their work.[24]

This book, then, considers a large group of donor, prayer, invocation, and other types of inscriptions, mainly (though not exclusively) in mosaic, from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim spaces of the late antique period, considered here to be the period from the fourth to the eighth centuries, from both sides of the Mediterranean, in order to examine these texts within their particular spatial contexts.[25] As it zooms between a wider Mediterranean perspective and a close consideration of

particular monuments, its primary aim is to place inscriptions within the spatial, visual, religious, and cultural contexts of the period. This goal corresponds with that articulated by Amy Papalexandrou more than a decade and a half ago, to "put the texts back on the buildings."[26] We should continue to analyze individual monuments and their programs, but we must also develop our knowledge of the range of textual possibilities across spaces sacred to different cults and creeds, as many of these were similarly rooted in the literary and visual traditions of the Roman world.

A second aim of this book is to investigate which features, if any, differentiate "Christian," or "Jewish," or "Islamic," inscriptions from their own or classical predecessors, as well as features or themes which persist throughout.[27] While the languages in which these texts are written differ in some cases – for example, inscriptions from synagogues are sometimes written in Hebrew and sometimes in Greek – they share a number of features, including forms of address, information presented, quotations of sacred texts, and engagement with the architecture of the building. In this context, I argue that, through the texts written into their buildings, late antique patrons, especially Christians, expressed their cultural and religious affiliations in more complicated, and sometimes playful, ways than has previously been thought.[28] Words written in churches enabled educated patrons to employ what has been termed "Christian classicism," the continued use of classical language, literature, and cultural references, to express their new faith in old terms and put their education (*paideia*) on display.[29] However, these texts were not produced by a backward-looking culture, but by Christians who used familiar forms of expression in order to make innovative, sophisticated points about their religion and culture.

A third aim is to shift the focus onto different components of the inscriptions from those that have been considered by previous work on the texts. A large number of extant inscriptions from the period have dedicatory components, and they have been studied for the information that they provide, including donors' names, dedications of buildings, and dates. Late antique inscriptions have been explored in terms of the relative popularity of church building,[30] the epigraphic formulae of donation,[31] the identification and self-promotion of donors,[32] as well as identity more broadly.[33] Because of the prevailing focus on the donor, certain themes that emerge from the inscriptions have gone under-examined, including vision and visuality.[34] As a result, while this study engages with the donors who paid for, and who in some cases may have composed, the inscriptions, the focus here remains on other facets of the texts. By reading these elements within and against the larger context of late antique approaches to the visual, we may glimpse the ways in which texts were intended to complement, supplement, or complicate visual experiences. This book, then, plays in the rich sandbox that the corpus of late antique inscriptions offers, and focuses on themes that emerge from surviving texts; but, because of the size of the corpus (in the thousands), does not pretend to engage all the corners of that sandbox.[35] There is still much work to be done to excavate the full potential of inscriptions from the sacred spaces of late antiquity, and this book aims to function as a significant step in that process.

The vast majority of inscriptions that survive from the sacred interiors of late antiquity are laid in mosaic into the pavements of churches and synagogues on both sides of the Mediterranean. Because of the durability of their stone and, sometimes, glass materials, and because of their placement on floors, which remained more or less intact when the walls of the buildings came down, these texts dominate the corpus of surviving inscriptions. We need not take their accidence of survival as an indication that they were the most common type of inscription in the late antique interior; indeed, we have likely lost a large number of mosaic, as well as painted, inscriptions from the walls of churches, as well as synagogues. Unfortunately, unlike the versified wall inscriptions of the churches of Rome, many of which were written down and preserved in *syllogae* before they vanished in and after the medieval period, the words written onto the walls of the majority of churches and other buildings in cities and towns must remain lost. My examination here is thus necessarily shaped by the character of the evidence: the majority of surviving inscriptions from the mosaic pavements of buildings, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, and the few mosaic, painted, or carved texts from walls mainly preserved in the west (with several important exceptions in the east).

As they were incorporated into the very fabric of late antique buildings and were pre-planned along with adjacent images, mosaic inscriptions are distinguished by their medium from other types of inscribed texts, which could be added later.[36] Mosaic texts were public ones, typically written in majuscule letters and placed in highly visible spaces within buildings, and were meant to be read by their donors, members of the local clergy and congregation, and visitors from near and far.[37] The majority of surviving mosaic inscriptions are from Christian spaces, though these were not the only buildings to be decorated with mosaic: indeed, synagogues, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, often possessed elaborate floor mosaics, while mosques featured wall mosaics. Inscriptions from late antique synagogues as well as (Umayyad) mosques are considered here, too, as they possess a number of similarities to, as well as differences from, Christian texts, which reveal the often close engagement between artists, writers, and readers of different religious affiliations.[38] In order to explore the chronological development of various epigraphic features, I make arguments about relative chronology, but do not attempt to establish an absolute chronology for particular epigraphic formulae or themes, as such an undertaking would require a separate technical study which would inevitably run into all of the numerous issues which afflict attempts to date works of art (e.g. by style) and script (e.g. by paleography).[39] The typical capital script of the Greek and Latin inscriptions, a feature of the texts that endows them with an almost uniformly monumental character, is discussed – for example, when it is executed in a particular color, or when it possesses significant decorative features – but this book does not aim to be the last word on the scripts of inscriptions, which can perhaps tell us more about mosaic workshops than about the specific significances that inscribed texts had for late antique readers.[40]

While issues remain with the evidence, it is vital that we consider late antique inscriptions trans-regionally. Despite linguistic differences (Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Syriac, Hebrew, and Arabic), as well as differences of genre or register

(e.g. prose versus poetry), many of the same themes feature in inscriptions from Arabia (roughly the area of modern Jordan) and Syria to Hispania (modern Spain), and from Italy to North Africa.[41] Thanks to the regional catalogs of inscriptions published in the past several decades, as well as older corpora, we are now able to begin reassessing how inscribed texts functioned in their architectural settings, both as texts to be read and as images to be viewed and responded to. This reassessment is essential, as we cannot properly understand even the basic facets of late antique religious cultures without reading the texts Roman pagans or polytheists, Christians, Jews, and Muslims wrote into the very fabric of their sacred buildings, which are important pieces of evidence for verbal, physical, and mental actions in, and reactions to, sacred spaces.

Throughout, this book looks at late antique inscriptions as they engage with or consciously disengage from the previous epigraphic, cultural, and religious traditions of the Graeco-Roman world. Because of the multifunctional nature of many inscriptions, I am wary of placing them into boxes – "donor," "votive," "honorific," "ekphrastic" (descriptive), even "epigram" (poem) – according to categories current in epigraphic scholarship. Although these categories are useful for comparing like to like, they are restrictive and fail to account for inscriptions of different types (e.g. verse and prose)[42] that appear next to each other in the same spaces, as well as inscriptions which perform multiple functions simultaneously: as Ann Marie Yasin has pointed out, these inscriptions "confound Greco-Roman categories," as they "are . . . part euergetistic, part public, part honorific."[43] The dedicatory inscription from Gerasa with which we began functioned as an honorific to the patron who "brings beautiful marvels" to the city; as a Christian claim of the primacy of the apostles Peter and Paul, "to whom the Saviour gave authority"; and as an ekphrasis (description)-in-miniature of the decoration of the church, especially of the "vividly-coloured stones" of the mosaic.

Each chapter begins with an abbreviated case study of a single monument, taking us to churches and chapels in Italy (Ravenna), Algeria, Greece, and Jordan in order to set the scene for in-depth examinations of major issues raised by the inscriptions themselves. Chapter 2, "Material Texts," considers the ways that inscribed texts look, focusing on their colors and materials as well as how the texts describe their own materiality, often drawing upon the stone or glass materials of which they are made to make aesthetic and religious proclamations that shine new light upon the "jeweled style" of the period as it was linked to a new model of sacred visuality.[44] Chapter 3, "Framing Texts, Framing Belief," focuses on the visual aspects of the inscriptions and enumerates the powers and possibilities of the frames of inscribed texts, particularly the *tabula ansata* ("tablet-with-handles"), a monumental – and monumentally prolific – form born in a classical context and adapted for Christian, Jewish, and Muslim use. Chapter 4, "Ekphrasis and Experience," examines the ability of inscriptions to prompt prescribed responses from their readers, as well as allowing them to "read" themselves into the building, encouraging motion and reflection as well as other ritual activities in its interior. Chapter 5, "Embedding Texts into Images," turns from the often complex, sometimes lengthy verse inscriptions (epigrams) of Chapter 4 to the shorter

texts placed next to images within sacred interiors, concentrating especially at the verbal-visual role of *tituli* ("titles") and name labels that complement images of biblical scenes in churches and synagogues. Finally, Chapter 6, "Embedded Prayers," concentrates on the inscribed prayers of donors, both lay and clerical, and their families, texts that memorialize actual but ephemeral prayers made within the space that also invite re-performance, often cloaking themselves in the language of the Old Testament (especially the Psalms) in order to collapse the biblical past with the present within the space of the church or synagogue. By leading us on a journey through the verbal and visual possibilities of these complicated "textimages,"[45] this book challenges the preexisting idea that late antique building inscriptions were simply dry dedications meant to preserve the names of patrons for posterity, and draws attention to the often complicated ways that the texts created potent points at which a range of visitors could interact with sacred spaces, with each other, and with their ancestors. Simultaneously operating as verbal and visual objects, the inscriptions within late antique interiors argue for the powerfully interactive character of these spaces, which provoked consensus but also independent thought, discussion, and debate, and for the existence of an engaged reader-viewer in the period, whether or not they could read every word of the text.

Writing and reading in the temple and the city

Before turning to the roles played by inscriptions in the late antique interior, it is important to consider the ways that the previously dominant culture in the Mediterranean, that of Roman paganism or polytheism, used words in buildings. The importance of the written word in a cultic building was not new in late antiquity. In fact, words frequently were writ large onto the façades of Roman temples, a fitting use of the monumental letterforms popular in the period. This type of display, especially of the names of donors, can be seen in an inscription in the heart of the city of Rome, on the architrave of the Pantheon (Figure 1.3):

> M. AGRIPPA L. F. COS. TERTIUM FECIT
>
> M(arcus) Agrippa, son of L(ucius), consul for the third time, had (this building) built.[46]

This inscription continues to gleam in the sunlight, but its gilded bronze letters (*litterae auratae* or *litterae aureae*), which record the building's construction by Marcus Agrippa, architect of the emperor Augustus, purport to be older than they are. The text appears to have been inscribed not onto the front of Agrippa's original building, completed in 25 BCE, but onto the renovated version built by the emperor Hadrian in the mid-second century CE. The letters visible today are modern versions put up around the year 1900 to replace the lost Roman originals.[47] Despite the distance between the contemporary appearance of the letters and their earlier incarnation, the golden inscription gives us a sense of the monumental Roman inscription: executed in large capital letters with simple serifs, decorative lines on the ends of the

Figure 1.3 Pantheon, Rome, 114–125

Source: Photograph by Mario Roberto Duran Ortiz, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 international license

strokes that form each letter, the text broadcasts the name and office of the patron, Agrippa. Using abbreviations for the praenomen of Agrippa, "Marcus," as well as that of his father, "Lucius," and for the office of "consul," the inscription presents a compact statement of patronage and authority, writ large and meant to be read and understood.[48] Not all temples had prominent dedicatory inscriptions on their façades, but many in Rome and elsewhere did.[49] While the façades of Greek temples began to bear dedications from the Hellenistic period onwards, this practice is essentially Roman in character, connected to the function of the written word, especially the Latin or Greek word, as a marker of political and cultural dominance.[50] An exemplum of the Roman love for the word is the lengthier Greek dedication to the emperor Nero inscribed in bronze letters onto the architrave of the Parthenon, a building that was not originally designed to bear such a text.[51]

Besides typically concise, monumental donor inscriptions, Greek and Roman temples also contained inscribed objects, many of them given to the deity or deities worshipped in the building as votive gifts. Inscriptions placed on works of art, on tablets, or on the surfaces of the sanctuary walls themselves commemorated the reciprocal relationships established between dedicants and deities. Much has been written on these inscriptions, which typically named the parties involved

(dedicant, deity) as well as providing the general motivation for the gift (e.g. *ex voto*, given "from a vow"), their shared formulae allowing the inscriptions to create a kind of network of successful interactions with the god.[52] Portable votive objects – crosses, liturgical silver, anatomical models and plaques – continued to be donated to late antique churches, representing, in some places at least, the continuation of age-old practices of communicating with the divine through matter.[53] Sometimes these texts were legible: Pliny the Younger, for example, describes the numerous inscriptions written onto the pillars and walls of the sanctuary of Clitumnus near Spoleto in central Italy, testifying to the healing powers of the god and his sacred spring.[54] Often, however, the grouped sets of votives seem likely to have concealed more than they revealed, testifying to the efficacy of the cult but veiling their own specifics through small letterforms and difficult-to-read techniques of production (such as stippling) as much as through their generic formulae.

In the late Roman period, attitudes towards inscribed texts appear to have begun to change. Certain types of inscriptions began to decline precipitously: honorific inscriptions, for example, usually paired with statues of local notables, began to die out along with the statues themselves.[55] Imperial decrees, which had been inscribed in the public spaces of the empire's cities, also decreased in frequency, with some interesting exceptions: for example, the brief but significant resurgence in exhibiting new imperial laws in the sixth century, during the reigns of the emperors Anastasius and Justinian.[56] However, other types of texts persisted, including the dedicatory inscriptions that are the core of the focus of this book. These texts were transplanted from the exteriors of sacred buildings and from votive gifts to the surfaces of the buildings's interiors, borrowing formulae from earlier inscriptions and integrating themselves into the fabric of the building, whether carved, painted, or laid in mosaic.[57]

This transplantation was the result of a change in the function of the sacred interior. While the interiors of temples were typically places for the storage of gifts, or for the visitation of the cult statue of the god, many of the most important communal rituals, including sacrifices, were staged outside of the temple.[58] In the three Abrahamic faiths that dominated the late antique Mediterranean, however, the interior of the sacred building – synagogue, church, or mosque – was a site for assembly and worship. The move of important inscriptions into the interior altered their character, creating a hybrid form of monumental dedication-prayers that were addressed to human and divine audiences alike, in turn shaping and reinforcing the communal character of the sacred space.[59]

A number of other epigraphic developments that suggest a new function for text, including texts in images, are noticeable from the third and fourth centuries CE onwards. Inscriptions, especially name labels for figures in mythological scenes, begin to propagate in number, a development that has been connected to the desire to allow patrons and viewers to show off their erudition (*paideia*), or perhaps to the patron's wish to control "pagan" imagery – for example, personifications of the seasons, or of natural forces – within secular as well as Christian and Jewish contexts.[60] We get glimpses of this practice in longer literary texts as

well, as in an epigram (probably not meant for inscription) written by the fourth-century poet Ausonius, in which he bemoans the pretentious verbal practices of a Roman patron:

> He orders the names [of Romulus and Remus, founders of Rome] to be woven into his silken gowns, he engraves them on his weighty silver, he burns them with wax into the portals of his doors and the display cases of his halls.[61]

Instead of control over pagan subjects, Ausonius's text emphasizes the prestige value of inscriptions, which, though connected to the display of *paideia*, is conveyed merely through the names of the Roman twins. Outside of the homes of the elite, Greek and Roman sculptural programs gained longer inscriptions that functioned as textual glosses, enhancing their literary qualities: the Roman sculptures in the grotto at Sperlonga on the coast between Rome and Naples, for example, were paired with a verse inscription in the fourth century, adding a Virgilian layer to sculptures depicting Odysseus's adventures on his journey home from Troy.[62] Poets such as those who contributed to the sixth-century *Cycle* of Agathias continued to write verses that were, or at least that pretend to have been, displayed in public buildings and next to works of art,[63] as well as poems to describe the "ancient" (Greek and Roman) statues that decorated the public spaces of cities like Constantinople.[64]

None of these types of text was entirely new in late antiquity: labels for figures, for example, were in vogue in Greek art during the Archaic period and often obsessively provide names for every figure or object depicted on the surfaces of vases.[65] However, by the fourth century CE, these developments suggest a preference for text in a retrospective context, as authors, especially poets, employed Greek and Roman literary genres such as ekphrasis to compose classicizing descriptions of buildings and works of art (including centuries-old works), some of which may have been inscribed on or next to their subjects. The birth of a novel kind of adaptation, the biblical paraphrase (of Homer's works, for example), and a new form of poem, the *cento*, made up of fragments borrowed and adapted from poems by earlier authors, testify to an aesthetic turn towards quotation and retrospection, in which elements from the past were remixed to form new forms of visual and verbal art.[66]

The period was not only one of new contexts for texts, but also one that saw a loosening of the strictly ordered letterforms typical of the Roman public inscription, as stonecutters and painters began to experiment with the shapes of letters.[67] This birth of the "animated letter," forms that appear to morph or change into something besides the letters of the alphabet, has been studied by scholars such as Laura Kendrick. Kendrick points to the epitaphs from the catacombs of Rome, primarily produced in the fourth century, whose letters, combined with symbols such as doves and fish, seem to sprout serifs in the shapes of vegetal elements.[68] Similarly active letters can already be seen in the third century CE in the Roman east, as at the military town of Europos, also called Dura from the Aramaic word for fortress, on the Roman-Persian border, where a dedication painted in black

Figure 1.4 Latin inscription from the *principia*, Dura Europos, Syria, c. 222/223, Yale-French excavations at Dura Europos, Yale University Art Gallery 1932.1207a

Source: Photograph © Yale University Art Gallery

onto the plastered wall of the *principia*, the administrative headquarters for the Roman legion, not only plays with script size and word arrangement, but also with the forms of the letters themselves (Figure 1.4).[69] In the dedication, the large letters *SPQ[R]*, the traditional Latin abbreviation for "The Senate and the People of Rome" (*Senatus Populusque Romanus*, or a variant thereof), appear to grow

vegetal forms: the serifs of the three surviving letters begin to curl like the shoots of a plant, while the *S* and *Q* sprout stylized ivy leaves from their midsections. No longer just capital letters that speak to the authority of the Roman state, these forms have gained a decorative power that adds to their visual presence, hinting at a new world of letters that have the power to shape-shift and elicit emotional reactions from viewers. The fact that the inscription at Dura may have been a practice piece rather than a finished text does not subtract from its especially non-Roman appearance.[70] Letters like these would eventually morph into the complicated and wonderful initials of the medieval manuscript, turning into visual and spiritual feasts for the eyes and mind: indeed, the earliest initial with decorative elements has been found in a fourth-century text, the so-called Virgilius Augusteus manuscript.[71] Others have focused on parallel developments that indicate an increasing attention to the visual character of text, including the rise in popularity of monograms and other "hybrid graphic formulations" such as the Chi-Rho, as well as the elaborately visual creations of the fourth-century poet Optatian, in which secondary verses within the main text form images made out of letters.[72]

Scholars have connected these developments to the rise of Christianity as the religion dominant in the empire after the fourth century CE. As many have pointed out, Christianity, like Judaism, had a central sacred text, the Bible. While written texts played a central role in pagan cults as well, the word took on a new significance for Christians, who held that God (and Christ-as-God) was the word incarnate (John 1:1), and that Scripture was not only the word of Christ, but his body.[73] In this world that saw writing as real presence rather than as a trace of a formless idea or an absent author, it is perhaps not surprising that texts written into sacred interiors, and not just Christian ones, began to transform as artists explored the visual powers of words made material.[74] It was during this moment that Servius, a grammarian active in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, wrote a commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid* that emphasized the flexibility of the term *perlegerent* ("they would have read all the way through," from *lego*, "read") by reference to its Greek relative, γράφω, "draw" or "write": "Virgil was not inept in speaking of a picture being 'read,' since the Greek γράψαι is used of both writing and drawing."[75] By making clear that things drawn (or painted) and things written not only exist in the same conceptual universe, but can also sometimes (if not always) possess the same visual and verbal properties, the commentator reminds us of the ancient debate about the relative powers of words and images. So, while the debate that Servius enters was not new in the fourth century, it is tempting to see the fact that he chooses to equate the two, rather than to argue for the precedence of one over another, as a marker of the intense fusion of, or slippage between, the verbal and the visual in his age.[76]

We will return to these issues again and again in the following chapters, but it is not prudent to ask Servius and his commentary to bear the weight of a fundamental cultural shift in the reception of the text as image. Indeed, contemporaries of the grammarian appear to have viewed the two as fundamentally different forms of communication: Augustine, for example, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, famously wrote that pictures were for seeing and praising, while letters were

for seeing, praising, *and* reading.[77] However, when added to the picture of the new textuality of the late antique period evident from the inscriptional evidence, the words of Servius act as a reminder that artists, writers, readers, and viewers of the fourth century and beyond were able to draw upon a rich classical tradition of debates about the relative powers of words and images, importing ancient ideas into contexts suffused with new forms of religious belief. By the end of the fourth century, Christian writers considered writing to be an expression of faith and, thus, a holy activity, and could compare the beauty of elegant handwriting to the majesty of God's creation, both of which point back at the skill of their composers:

> Just as someone who reads letters, by their beauty, senses the power and ability of the hand and the finger which wrote them together with the intention of the writer, thus he who looks upon creation with understanding, perceives the hand and the finger of its Creator as well as his intention, that is, his love.[78]

In this new world of textual presence, writers could connect their written dedications to the concept of divine presence put forth by the Gospel of John meaningfully as well as playfully, as did the official Mouselios, who recorded his renovation of the Mouseion, the university of Constantinople, on a porphyry column in the Philadelphion: "Mouselios willingly dedicated these works to words, believing purely that God is the Word."[79]

Literacy as red herring?

While the fourth and early fifth centuries appear to have witnessed the development of a special kind of textuality, even in the face of the decline of certain types of inscriptions, an important question remains: could, and did, late antique visitors to churches, synagogues, and mosques read the words that filled these interiors? At first glance, the texts inscribed in sacred interiors would seem to possess significance only if they were actually read, and read widely. A great deal of scholarship has considered the literacy of ancient cultures, especially in the Roman world, and the consensus remains that literacy was limited to elites, especially men from wealthy families and the clergy.[80]

While it remains likely that elites were often the primary producers and intended consumers of inscriptions, especially those written in verse, scholars of the Roman and other pre-modern periods whose literacy rates have been presumed to be low have begun to push back against the bias towards "full literacy." As Juliet Fleming writes in her study of graffiti and other non-traditional forms of writing in early modern England, "we tend to understate the social range of the practices of literacy (including that of literature) in earlier periods."[81] She urges us to ask different questions of the material: "What is writing? What kinds of reading and writing skills – skills of which we are now largely ignorant – may have constituted literacy at such a moment?"[82] For Fleming, following Jacques Derrida, the act of "writing," as well as its product, a "text," is historically and culturally contingent, and approaches to and understandings of both act and product seem to have expanded

in late antiquity.[83] This study responds to this call to consider a wider range of texts as well as reading and viewing practices associated with a broader spectrum of audiences.[84] Although most of the texts considered here are "traditional" in the sense that they are largely words composed and written (carved, painted, laid in mosaic) according to the standard epigraphic practices of the period, I argue that their reception involved a larger sphere of modes of response than has been recognized previously.

In his discussion of his church-building activities at Nola in Italy in the fifth century, Paulinus, bishop of Nola, considers the question of Christian audiences of "illiterate peasants" (as he describes them) who came to venerate St. Felix at the site.[85] Justifying his decision to decorate his churches with a cycle of monumental paintings of biblical scenes, Paulinus describes the impact that he hopes these scenes will have on the unlearned congregants:

> Therefore it seemed to us useful work gaily to embellish Felix's houses all over with sacred paintings in order to see whether the spirit of the peasants would not be surprised by this spectacle and undergo the influence of the coloured sketches which are explained by inscriptions over them, so that the script may make clear what the hand has exhibited. Maybe that, when they all in turn show and reread to each other what has been painted, their thoughts will turn more slowly to eating [instead of drinking wine], while they saturate themselves with a fast that is pleasing to the eyes, and perhaps a better habit will thus in their stupefaction take root in them, because of the painting artfully diverting their thoughts from their hunger.[86]

Here, the bishop makes clear that the paintings that adorn the walls of Felix's churches were paired with inscriptions (*tituli*, literally "titles") that, he writes, were meant to "explain" and to "clarify" the paintings for viewers. We will return to the complex functions of these "title" inscriptions (*tituli*) at length in Chapter 5, but what is important here is the author's emphasis on the reading of the paintings with "titles." These paintings, he states, were ones that even the "peasants" could show and "reread" to each other (*omnes picta vicissim ostendunt releguntque sibi*).[87] While there is some debate whether the *tituli* or the paintings themselves are being "reread" (*relegunt*), Paulinus appears to be implying that even among groups of uneducated or undereducated viewers, at least one member would be able to decipher the subject of the image (a kind of visual literacy), or, more likely, the words written over the pictures (textual literacy).[88] It is unclear what the level of difficulty of these texts would have been, though if Paulinus is referring to the "titles" of his own composition that he discusses later in the same work, elaborate poems that evoke the rich range of meanings – literal, typological, symbolic – that images, especially in the apse, could have had for viewers, these designated readers would have been quite learned indeed.[89] Paulinus's contemporaries occasionally imply the presence of a guide who would have helped viewers interpret images, though this seems to have been a more common situation at pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land, where visitors sometimes needed assistance remembering

which biblical events were supposed to have happened where, or to imagine the grand original appearance of a biblical site that lay in ruins: the Jerusalem Temple, for example, whose magnificence would have demanded a particularly skillful evocation (ekphrasis).[90] The clergy could also on occasion have directed congregants to particular inscriptions, referring perhaps to "titles" of biblical scenes or to donors who paid for parts of the decorative program of the church.

While we may assume that Paulinus is describing the act of "reading" the inscriptions and images out loud, as he states that groups of people read them to each other, his description of reading practices is too oblique to give us much insight into the reading of simple, as opposed to more complex, literary inscriptions.[91] The former type, assembled using common formulae – for Greek inscriptions, typically the name of the presiding priest or bishop, the building activity undertaken (a new foundation, a renovation, etc.), and the names of donors, including their (generic) motivations (salvation, for the remission of sins) – were easier to read, their repeated elements ensuring that those readers with even a partial knowledge of the alphabet in use (Greek, Latin, Hebrew, or other), would likely be familiar with at least certain chunks of the text.[92] Epigrams, verse inscriptions such as those written by Paulinus, would have taken more time and care for most readers, perhaps encouraging the formation of the "textual communities" who could have read, reread, and discussed the texts.[93] Importantly, the verse inscriptions that were popular in the period were widespread in the east as well as the west, and in towns as well as cities, suggesting that they were read and understood more widely than has been thought previously.[94]

Other narrow windows into the social practice of reading texts inscribed onto the walls or icons within churches do survive from the period. In the sixth century, Gregory of Tours writes of a boy who learned to read by copying into a book the letters written "above the icons" (*super iconicas*) of apostles and saints, and then asking learned clerics what the letters were.[95] In Gregory's account, it is not clear whether these "icons," or images, were painted onto the walls of the churches with which the boy was familiar, or onto more portable images. What is most interesting about this passage, however, is the chain of actions that the "letters" prompt – the boy wants to find out what they mean, and so he writes them down and asks the more educated readers around him.

In the literature of the period, inscriptions perform similarly social functions: in the Donatist churches of North Africa, for example, they preserve the names of the martyrs of the community as well as the name of the persecuting bishop, Caecilian of Carthage.[96] As active, dynamic presences within buildings, texts could teach, as an anonymous sermon on virginity, probably written in the fourth century, reminds us:

> You have to remember, don't you, those precepts, which the inscribed wall (of the church) itself *flung* at your eyes [. . . *quae oculis tuis ipse scriptus paries (ecclesiae) ingerebat*]: "The married woman and the virgin differ; the one who is not married thinks about the affairs of the Lord, how she might be holy in body and in spirit/soul."[97]

Quoting a biblical passage (1 Corinthians 7:24) to remind the audience of the special status of the devoted virgin, the author of the sermon also reminds his listeners of the special power of words to leap off their supports and into our eyes. While no similar inscription survives from the interior of a late antique church, inscribed texts do occasionally remind us of the special status of virgins: a fragmentary carved inscription from the fourth-century church at Sétif in Algeria appears to name an area of the church as the "enclosure of the virgins" (*virginum cancellus*).[98]

This anonymous sermon on virginity is not the only one that seems to imply that the reading capacities of congregations, at least those in urban settings, were wider than has been thought previously: Jocelyn Maxwell, for example, has pointed out the frequent references that John Chrysostom makes to reading in his sermons delivered during his time in Antioch.[99] We will consider several other "inscription reading" scenes from late antique chronicles and saints's lives in the subsequent chapters. While we will remain focused on the aspects of the inscriptions themselves that argue for their active reading and viewing, even these brief episodes testify to the memorial and commemorative powers of texts in sacred interiors, as well as their reception by readers. Similarly, these different texts, including "letters" of saints' names (mentioned by Gregory of Tours) and the biblical quotations described by the anonymous sermon, were a part of the same verbal world as epigrams, and should be considered as such.

The question of when these inscriptions were read is an interesting one that will be raised again and again in the following chapters, but I will touch upon it briefly here. It seems likely that the faithful would typically have encountered inscriptions during their visits to the church, synagogue, or mosque for regular or special services. Clerics would by necessity have seen, and read, the texts more often, and certain texts seem intended mainly for their eyes based on their placement: in the church, for example, inscriptions placed on the floor behind the altar.[100] However, even these texts may have been accessible during certain times, as it appears to have been difficult for the clergy to control the space of the church outside of services.[101] Access may have been gendered in certain buildings: for example, in Hagia Sophia, the emperor Justinian's showpiece church in Constantinople, elite women were restricted to the upper galleries.[102] In the case of donor inscriptions, texts may have been performed during their dedication but, in some cases, would also be re-performed by generations of readers, keeping alive the memory of the original donors as well as allowing readers to channel their own prayers through the aliases of the dedicants.[103] Quotations of the Psalms may have been performed on the days of the liturgical calendar with which they were associated, perhaps as part of the liturgy for those particular days, while epitaphs, such as those common in the pavements of churches in North Africa, could have been re-performed on the anniversary of the deceased's death.[104] Read aloud by individuals and crowds of people, the sound of these inscriptions when voiced would have enlivened the sacred interiors of the period, adding a dynamic sensory element to the experience of buildings.[105] While inscriptions were only fragments of the sonic landscape of sacred spaces, much of which has been lost today, importantly they were ones

that were built into their very walls and floors. As such, they lack the spontaneity of purely oral texts as well as the ephemerality of musical performances, but they make visible some of the repeatable formulae that shaped individuals' actions in and responses to these spaces, as inscriptions functioned to enable Christians, Jews, and Muslims to construct their identities as "liturgical subjects."[106]

Of course, inscriptions were not always easily readable, even by the "fully" literate. As Liz James has pointed out, certain inscriptions were rendered difficult to read, if not illegible, by their placement and the size of their script.[107] In some cases, even hard-to-read words writ large on buildings and monuments in prominent spaces in the city served to inscribe state power and authority.[108] Similarly, certain types of coded writing – monograms, for example – seem designed to conceal as much as to reveal their verbal content.[109] Just like some inscriptions on smaller, more personal objects such as rings, some texts written into interiors appear to have possessed magical functions that operated independently of their legibility or visibility, channeling divine powers to protect buildings and those in them from the chaotic or evil forces of the outside world.[110] These features of texts are important and will be treated in the following chapters, but based upon the evidence of the texts themselves, I argue that they were not always primary: that is, the inscriptions were for the most part intended to be read as words, and appreciated as visual objects, or, if we prefer, images. They may have been magical texts, but they were rarely *only* magical. Words in and on buildings demanded, and demand, the attention of a range of audiences, and, if we care to look at them, reward an expansive examination of their possibilities as texts that shaped the way that people engaged with their spaces of worship, and through them, the divine itself.

Note on dates, names, terms, and translations

The vast majority of texts, monuments, and objects discussed here date to the late antique period, and so feature dates given in CE.[111] The names of provinces or regions used are primarily historical and of the period (e.g. "Palestine," "Arabia"), though modern city and country names are also used to situate the reader in geographic space. Other names are given in the most commonly recognized form where the figure or person is well known – so the Latinized "Procopius" instead of "Prokopios" – but otherwise are given in the form closest to the original Latin or Greek form. I use the words "reader" and "viewer" to describe those individuals who interacted with the inscriptions considered here, to emphasize the reception of inscriptions as texts in the case of the former, and as images in the case of the latter. While I do not use these two terms interchangeably, and do not mean to imply that words could be read in exactly the same way as images, or images as words, I intend for their alternation to make the "reader" of these pages think critically about the ways that people in sixth-century Gerasa, and that we today, encounter, process, and respond to letters placed in close proximity to each other. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Greek and Latin texts are my own; inscriptions are written using the conventions of the Leiden System.

Notes

1 The pavement dates to c. 540, and is Yale University Art Gallery 1932.1735. The mosaic was prominently displayed at the entrance to the 2012 exhibition *Byzantium and Islam* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: Evans with Ratliff 2012, 12, no. 1; also Welles 1938, 484, no. 327; Piccirillo 1993, 554.

2 A sensitive preliminary assessment of the mosaic and the challenges it presents to conservators and viewers is Podany and Matheson 1999. For the account of the conservation of the mosaic, performed after 2009, Evans with Ratliff 2012, 12, no. 1; Brody and Snow 2015.

3 [+ Ἡ μά]λα θαύματα καλὰ φέρ[ει πᾶ]ς ἱεροφάντης / ἀνθρώποις οἳ τήνδε πόλιν καὶ γαῖαν ἔχουσιν / οὕνεκεν οἶκον ἔδειμε μαθηταῖς πρωτοστάταις / Πέτρῳ καὶ Παύλῳ, τοῖς γὰρ σθένος ἄνθετο Σωτήρ / ἀργυρέοις κόσμοισι καὶ εὐβαφεέσσι λίθοισιν / κλεινὸς Ἀναστάσιος, θεομήδεα πιστὰ διδάσκων: trans. in Evans with Ratliff 2012, 12, adapted. On the inscription, see especially Rhoby 2009, 393–4.

4 On sacred space (versus sacred place) in late antiquity, a popular topic of late, Yasin 2009, 14–45; Wescoat and Ousterhout 2012; Day, Hakola, Kahlos, and Tervahauta 2016; Bogdanović 2018.

5 These issues are foregrounded for this specific mosaic by Podany and Matheson 1999; also recently, Kondoleon 2014, 227–9. The field of early Christian liturgical and ritual studies is ever-growing, although many problems remain, particularly the issue of knowing which liturgy was practiced in a given place at any time outside of the centers of Constantinople, Rome, Alexandria, and Jerusalem: Taft 1984. On the relationship of architecture to liturgy, focused on the cities of Constantinople and Rome, Mathews 1971; Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 492–540; de Blaauw 1994; Duval 2003a; Doig 2008, 53–108.

6 Gerasa, a Hellenistic foundation, was originally one of the cities of the Decapolis, a loose league of semi-autonomous cities that were largely culturally and linguistically Greek. These cities were altered by Roman rule, notably through the modification of their street grids: March 2009, 166–9; Raja 2012, 137–89; Kennedy 2013.

7 See e.g. Thomas 2000, 7–8; on the Monastery of Apa Jeremias, Quibell 1912.

8 On the importance of Alexandria, Haas 1997; Watts 2006; McKenzie 2007.

9 Loose glass tesserae were found in the apse, indicating the presence of ceiling mosaics: Crowfoot 1931, 28–9.

10 The laudable goal articulated by Baxandall 1988. A defense of studying the visuality of pre-modern cultures is made strongly by Nelson 2000a. For some recent thoughts on ways to address the temporal, cultural, and other divides between ourselves and the Byzantines, Peers 2015; Betancourt 2017.

11 Kitzinger 1951a, reprinted as Kitzinger 1976; Kitzinger 1951b, 211–17, 1965, 1970, ii; Maguire 1987a, 1996a. Other important, if summary, exceptions include Février 1984; Bruneau 1988; Arnulf 1997; Dunbabin 1999b.

12 James 2007a; also Kalopissi-Verti 1992; Papalexandrou 2001; Eastmond and James 2003; Spingou 2012; Drpić 2014, 2016a, 2016b. Outside the United Kingdom and the United States, Wolfgang Höradner and Andreas Rhoby at the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Vienna have been particularly active: Höradner and Rhoby 2008; Rhoby 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016b, 2017.

13 See Russell 1999, who mines the text-rich world of Assyrian palaces, including the well-known "Standard Inscription" which is written across cycles of reliefs and lists the titles and deeds of the king.

14 E.g. Baines 2007.

15 Among an ever-growing bibliography, Goldhill and Osborne 1994; Corbier 1995, reproduced in Corbier 2006; Elsner 1996a; Newby and Leader-Newby 2007; Butz 2009; Squire 2009; Butz 2010; Squire 2011; Pappas 2011, 2012.

16 Including Diebold 2000; Hageman and Mostert 2005; Debiais 2009; Wetzel and Flückiger 2009; Krause and Schellewald 2011; Debiais 2017.

17 E.g. Petrucci 1993.
18 Contemporary artists have long been interested in the intersection between word and image: Drucker 1998; Morley 2007; Hunt, Lomas, and Corris 2010.
19 E.g. Boschung and Hellenkemper 2007; Eastmond 2015; Bedos-Rezak and Hamburger 2016; Berti, Bolle, Opdenhoff, and Stroth 2017.
20 E.g. Garipzanov, Goodson, and Maguire 2017.
21 For example, the 2011 issue of *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*, 24, n.s. 10, dedicated to inscriptions in liturgical spaces; Eastmond 2015; Berti, Bolle, Opdenhoff, and Stroth 2017; the ongoing series of books by the *Material Text Cultures* (*Materiale Textkulturen*) project at the University of Heidelberg, published by De Gruyter.
22 For example, the still useful works of Feissel 1989, 1993; Baumann 1999. On the continuing debate over the definition of "inscription," see Panciera 2012, though his attempt to define the special character of an "inscription" versus another type of text (texts written in atypical media, versus documents, and their intended reception by a larger group) will not be employed here, as it is too restrictive for the body of texts written in late antique buildings. On late antique inscriptions in Greek as well as Latin, in prose and verse, from a growing bibliography, see especially Robert 1948; Calderini 1987; Donati 1988; Popescu 1990; Mango 1991; Cavallo and Mango 1995; Feissel 1999; McLean 2002; Feissel 2006; Millar 2008b; Bolle, Machado, and Witschel 2017. A separate, parallel field has evolved around "Christian" epigraphy, a problematic division in the context of the evidence: Marucchi 1912; Carletti 1988, 2008; on the history of this category, Roueché and Sotinel 2017.
23 Gianfranco Agosti's field-defining work has focused especially on the meter, style, and erudition of epigrams, including those meant to be inscribed, as well as the social and cultural contexts of their production and reception: from a large bibliography, see especially Agosti 2005a, 2005b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011a, 2011b, 2011–2012, 2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, Forthcoming. A great deal of work has been done of late on late antique poetry in Greek and Latin generally: see especially Averil Cameron 2016, 163–84.
24 For example, the recent survey by Hachlili 2009, which has only a few brief words to say on inscriptions. Exceptions include Ihm 1960, who includes apse inscriptions in her catalog; Février 1984; Bruneau 1988; Belting-Ihm 1994; Leader-Newby 2007; Yasin 2009; Kiilerich 2011; Talgam 2014; Bolle, Westphalen, and Witschel 2015.
25 This work adopts a "long late antiquity" as a temporal framework because it allows for productive comparisons between the functions of texts in buildings of the three Abrahamic religions. The framework is also particularly applicable to church decoration in the Levant. In addition to mosques built by the Umayyads in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, the local Christian populations in that region continued to decorate their churches with mosaics of the same sort as in previous centuries: on these later mosaics, Di Segni 2009. On the history of and challenges to this periodization, Giardina 1999; Averil Cameron 2002; Marcone 2008; Inglebert 2017.
26 Papalexandrou 2001, 260.
27 For poetry, including epigrams, see especially the work of Gianfranco Agosti, e.g. Agosti 2007b, 2010c, 2011b, 2016b, 2016c; also the work of Marc Lauxtermann, e.g. Lauxtermann 1994, 2003, 131–47. Generally on the classical and the Christian, Elsner 1995, 1996c, 2007c; Kaldellis 2007, 173–88; also Merrony 1998, focused on the mosaic pavements of late antique churches.
28 On play in the medieval Christian inscription, Cutler 2004, reprinted in Cutler 2009, Article VI.
29 Kaldellis 2007, 177; also Agosti 2008a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011a, 2011b, 2016b, Forthcoming.
30 E.g. Dauphin 1980; Ward-Perkins 1984; Merrony 2013.
31 E.g. Caillet 1987b, 1993; Zettler 2001; Moralee 2004; Saastamoinen 2010.

32 On donor inscriptions, especially from churches, Cuscito 1989; Feissel 1989; Caillet 1993; Di Segni 1995; Duval and Pietri 1997; Baumann 1999; Caillet 2003; Haensch 2006; Yasin 2009; Haensch 2017. On the intersection between donors' inscriptions and their images, Hunt 1994; Hamarneh 1998; Habas 2008; Caillet 2011. On donor inscriptions from synagogues, Lifshitz 1967; Naveh 1978; Roth-Gerson 1987.
33 Funerary epigraphy has been vital to debates about community structure and cultural and ethnic identity in the late antique world: for example, Galvão-Sobrinho 1995; Woolf 1998; Handley 2003; Downs 2007; Carletti 2008; Yasin 2009; Conant 2012; also, more generally, Petrucci 1998.
34 The situation is the opposite to that in the study of Islamic art, where the word has long been recognized as image: see especially Dodd and Khairallah 1981; Bierman 1998; Blair 1998; Cutler 2004; Schick and Gharipour 2013.
35 While absolute comprehensiveness is to be desired, church mosaic pavements continue to be excavated in the eastern Mediterranean, in particular, at a fairly rapid rate, and as a result a number of inscriptions have yet to be published.
36 While this is the case for most mosaics in the eastern provinces and Italy, the prevailing use of the medium for tomb decoration in North African churches meant that different panels were added at different times without a preexisting master plan: e.g. Yasin 2005; Downs 2007.
37 Elite visitors were meant to and did read these inscriptions, as attests the fifth-century nobleman and poet Sidonius Apollinaris, who writes with dry humor to his friend Domitius about the readability of the verses inscribed on the walls of his private baths in Clermont-Ferrand, in Roman Gaul: "only a few lines of verse will cause the newcomer to stop and read: these strike the happy mean, for although they inspire no longing to read them again, they can be read through without boredom," Sidonius, *Letters* 2.2.7, trans. Dalton 1915, vol. 1, 38. On majuscule letters, especially the role of the Filocalian script sponsored by Pope Damasus in the 360s and 370s, Cardin 2008, 47–60; for a discussion of Damasus, see Chapter 6.
38 I am wary of the problem of splitting the Christian from the Jewish, pointed out by Elsner 2003. However, while Jews inscribed the same sorts of texts in their synagogues, they also displayed texts which have no Christian counterparts; for example, the lengthy rabbinic inscription in the synagogue at Rehov, near Beth Shean: Fine 2005a, 92–3, fig. 33; Hachlili 2009, 235–6. On inscriptions in domestic spaces, which are not considered extensively here, Scheibelreiter-Gail 2012.
39 This problem is mainly due to the very few precisely dated manuscripts from the period. On the promise and problems of using paleography as a dating method, McLean 2002, 42–5; Wilson 2008.
40 Morison 1972; a good overview is provided by Stokes 2010, 1219–22. On mosaic scripts especially, Milwright 2016, 82–106.
41 On the common epigraphic culture of late antiquity, Mango 1991; Ševčenko 1998, who places the epigraphic divide as late as the eighth century; Debiais 2015. The broader justification of trans-regional Mediterranean studies for the period is that of Horden and Purcell 2000; also Concannon and Mazurek 2016.
42 "Verse" and "prose" are not particularly effective categories for the inscriptional material, as even the "prose" inscriptions often incorporate verse elements: see Agosti 2008a, 198–202.
43 Yasin 2009, 149.
44 "Jeweled style" as a phrase coined by Roberts 1989.
45 A reversal of Mitchell's "imagetexts": Mitchell 1986.
46 *CIL* 6, 896.
47 On the Pantheon and its long and complicated history, Marder and Jones 2015. For a discussion of the lies and half-truths of renovation inscriptions in late antique Christian contexts, Yasin 2017.
48 On the monumentality of such texts, Elsner 1996b; Graham 2013; Thomas 2014a.

49 A good overview is that of von Hesberg, Eck, and Gronke 2007.
50 On earlier Greek building inscriptions, Umholtz 2002; Butz 2009. The study of Roman epigraphy has an extensive bibliography: still useful are the works of MacMullen 1982; Woolf 1996, who link monumental, public epigraphy to Roman identity (*Romanitas*). Good introductions are Cooley 2012; Bruun and Edmondson 2015.
51 The bronze letters do not survive, but their attachment holes have rendered the text of the inscription legible: *IG* 2,2, 3277; on the inscription, Carroll 1982; Hurwit 1999, 280–1; Welch 2007, 170–2.
52 For Greek and Roman votives and their inscriptions, which have garnered a great deal more attention than their later cousins, see especially Rouse 1902; Lazzarini 1976; Van Straten 1981; Veyne 1983; Derks 1998; Schörner 2003; Kiernan 2009; Rüpke 2009; Patera 2012; Weinryb 2015, especially essays by Jessica Hughes and Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis; Hughes 2017.
53 On late antique votives, a topic that still deserves much work, Engemann 1995; Witt 2006; Mathews 2009–10; Mathews 2016; Leatherbury 2017c, Forthcoming A.
54 Pliny, *Epistles* 8.8.7; see Beard 1991, 39–44; on other inscriptions associated with paintings in temples, Moormann 2011, 113–14, 171–8, 190–2.
55 Smith and Ward-Perkins 2016; though in the eastern provinces, some cities saw an increase in verse epigrams that honored officials, paired with their statues: e.g. Robert 1948; Sironen 2016.
56 Corcoran 2000; Feissel 2004, 2009, 2010; Toth and Rizos 2016, who point out the evidence for the display of legal texts in or near churches.
57 E.g. the formula "for the salvation of" (ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας): on the transformation of this formula from the Roman to the late antique period, Moralee 2004. On these developments, Thomas 2000, 229; Roueché 2006.
58 A good overview of sacrificial traditions is Petropolou 2012.
59 Yasin 2009, especially 149–50.
60 Maguire 1987a; Notermans 2001; Leader-Newby 2005, 2007; Maguire 2012.
61 Ausonius, *Epigrams* 26.7–10, trans. Kay 2001.
62 Squire 2007, 2009, 202–38.
63 On Agathias and his *Cycle*, Cameron and Cameron 1966; McCail 1969; Alan Cameron 1970; Garland 2011; Smith 2016; Averil Cameron 2016.
64 E.g. Christodorus' epigrams on statues in the Baths of Zeuxippos in Constantinople, *Greek Anthology* 2.
65 The François Vase is the classic example: on this and other objects, Immerwahr 1990; Snodgrass 2000; Osborne and Pappas 2007; Pappas 2011.
66 On the biblical epic, Herzog 1975; Fontaine 1981; Roberts 1985; Agosti 2001; on the *cento*, McGill 2005; Bažil 2009; Formisano and Sogno 2010; Sandnes 2011; Pelttari 2014. Generally also Elsner 2004; Agosti 2004–2005, 2012; Lobato 2012; on genre, Fuhrer 2013; Mulligan 2016, especially 166: "Late antique poets were not enervated by their lateness; they were empowered by it"; Pollmann 2017.
67 On these developments in Latin, Morison 1972; Bolle 2014. For developments in Greek, Cavallo 1967; Cavallo and Maehler 1987; a good overview is Wilson 2008. This same period also saw a change in scribal practices, most notably the adoption of miniscule (lowercase) cursive script by most chanceries across the empire, though the imperial chancery appears to have continued to use a majuscule (capital) script referred to as the "heavenly letters" (*litterae caelestes*): see the recent discussion of Manservigi and Mezzetti 2016, with previous bibliography; also Feissel 2004.
68 Kendrick 1999, 53–8; earlier scholars of inscriptions from Christian contexts interested in the visual aspects of these texts include Kaufmann 1917; Beyer n.d. On later Byzantine decorated initials, which begin to appear in the ninth century, Brubaker 1991; Maayan-Fanar 2011.

69 The inscription is dated to 222–223, and may have been a kind of demonstration piece for sign-painting students: currently in the Yale University Art Gallery 1932.1207a; Stauner 2004, 415–16, no. 397; Brody and Hoffman 2014, 268 no. 59.
70 As argued by Austin 2010, 256–64, 2016, 168–72; though she seems not to be aware that the text has survived in the Yale collection.
71 Cod. Vat. Lat. 3256; on the rise of decorated initials, see Nordenfalk 1970; Kendrick 1999; Tilghman 2011; Hamburger 2014; Garipzanov 2015; Tilghman 2016.
72 The phrase is that of Garipzanov 2015, 9. On monograms and symbols like the Chi-Rho, Garipzanov 2015; Debiais 2016; Garipzanov 2018. On Optatian, also discussed in Chapter 2, most recently Squire and Whitton 2017.
73 On the role of writing in pagan religious practices, Beard 1991; also Platt 2011, 20–3. On incarnation, Kendrick 1999, chs. 2–3.
74 On this discussion, and against interpretations influenced by the work of Jacques Derrida, see Kendrick 1999, 21.
75 *Nec incongrue legi picturam dixit, cum graece* γράψαι *et pingere dicatur et scribere*: Servius, *Commentary on Virgil's Aeneid* 6.34, ed. Thilo and Hagen 1883–1884, vol. 2, 11; trans. Squire and Whitton 2017, 45; on this text, Elsner 2014a, 1–6; Squire 2009, 147–8; Squire and Whitton 2017, 45–7. On the term *graphein*, also Lissaraggue 1992.
76 On these issues, Squire 2009, 2011; Leatherbury 2017b.
77 Augustine, *In Johnannis evangelium,* ed. Willems 1954, 244–5; on this text, Kendrick 1999, 36–65; Squire and Whitton 2017, 95–7.
78 Evagrius Ponticus, *Letter to Melania* 8.43–7, trans. Parmentier 1985, 9. Generally on writing and holiness in the period, Krueger 2004; Rapp 2007, 2009.
79 Ταῦτα λόγοις ἀνέθηκεν ἑκὼν Μούσηλιος ἔργα, πιστεύων καθαρῶς ὡς θεός ἐστι λόγος: *Greek Anthology* 9.800, in Paton 1917a, 430; its fragmentary remains identified on the column by Feissel 2003, 502 n. 20. On Mouselios, probably to be identified as an imperial official who lived in the early fifth century, during the reign of Theodosius II, Bardill 1997.
80 The essential survey of literacy in the Graeco-Roman world remains Harris 1989, especially 285–322 (on literacy in the late antique period); also Beard et al. 1991; Bowman and Woolf 1996; Johnson and Parker 2009. On late antique literacy particularly, Browning 1978; Gamble 1995; Everett 2009; Haines-Eitzen 2009; Bagnall 2011.
81 Fleming 2001, 9.
82 Fleming 2001, 9–10.
83 Fleming 2001, 12; Derrida's works are Derrida 1976, 1978a.
84 This same call is taken up by a number of recent works on Roman inscriptions and literacy, e.g. Franklin, Jr. 1991; Kellum 1999; Burrell 2009; Graham 2013.
85 *sed turba frequentior hic est rusticitas non cassa fide neque docta legendi*: Paulinus, *Carmen* 27.547–8, ed. von Hartel 1894b, 286, trans. Goldschmidt 1940, 62. On Paulinus, see the discussion in Chapter 5.
86 Paulinus, *Carmen* 27.580–7, ed. von Hartel 1894b, 288, trans. Goldschmidt 1940, 64–5: *Propterea visum nobis opus utile totis Felicis domibus pictura ludere sancta, si forte adtonitas haec per spectacula mentes agrestum caperet fucata coloribus umbra, quae super exprimitur titulis, ut littera monstret quod manus explicuit, dumque omnes picta vicissim ostendunt releguntque sibi, vel tardius escae sint memores, dum grata oculis ieiunia pascunt, atque ita se melior stupefactis inserat usus, dum fallit pictura famem. . . .*
87 Paulinus, *Carmen* 27.585–6, ed. von Hartel 1894b, 288, trans. Goldschmidt 1940, 65.
88 As *lego* was interpreted to mean "read" texts *or* images: see the discussion on Servius's commentary on Virgil, *supra* n. 75.
89 The discussion is summarized by Dijkstra 2016, 53–8, with further bibliography; also useful is Goldhill 2012, 93–5.

90 Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 9.17, appears to refer to an interpreter who helps the narrator (Prudentius?) interpret a painting of Saint Cassian; on this text, see the discussion in Chapter 2; and on similar interpreters in Greek sources, Agosti 2010b, 177. Guides of this sort are mentioned in accounts of pilgrims to the Holy Land, including the fourth-century pilgrim Egeria, *Itinerarium*, ed. and trans. Wilkinson 1971; Dijkstra 2016, 54; Johnson 2016b.

91 On the practices of reading aloud and silently, both of which were used in classical and late antiquity, Saenger 1997, who erroneously stresses the "birth" of silent reading in the late antique period; Gavrilov 1997; Small 1997, 11–25; Johnson 2000; Vatri 2012; McCutcheon 2015. On reading practices in the later Byzantine period, Hunger 1989; Cavallo 2007, 61–72. While some of the inscriptions considered here use continuous script (*scriptio continua*), or script without punctuation, they also employ common words and strategically placed line breaks that would aid even the silent reader: on the ways that readers read earlier Greek inscriptions, Vatri 2012. For an introduction to the larger debate about oral and written culture in the period, Haines-Eitzen 2009.

92 On formulae and legibility, Leatherbury 2016a; also the recent spate of work on short texts on amulets, which were presumably carried by a relatively wide swath of the population: Feissel, van den Hoek, and Herrmann, Jr. 2015; Jones 2016; de Bruyn 2017; Sanzo 2016, 2017.

93 Haines-Eitzen 2009, who applies the idea of "textual communities," borrowed from Brian Stock (e.g. Stock 1983), to the late antique Christian context. On reading as a social act in the ancient world, also Johnson 2000.

94 On the orality of late antique Greek verse inscriptions especially, and the range of audiences that encountered them, Agosti 2008a, who points out that the metrics and layout of many epigrams (e.g. with line breaks corresponding to rhythmic breaks) suggest they were accessible to a range of readers. On links (meter, vocabulary, etc.) between epigrams from urban and more rural settings, Agosti 2010b, 2015a, 2016c, 2017b. On the popularity of epigrams in the west, Guipponi-Gineste and Urlacher-Becht 2013.

95 Gregory of Tours, *Vitae patrum* 12.2, ed. Arndt and Krusch 1885, 263; on the passage, Brennan 1996, 70–1, n. 20.

96 As described by Optatus, *Sermo de Passione de SS Donati et Advocati* 8, trans. Tilley 1996, 57: "Here in the inscriptions (*titulationes nominum*), memory preserves the name of the persecution as Caecilianist until the end of time, lest after his [Bishop Caecilian of Carthage's] episcopate the parricide deceive others who were not privy to the things done in his name." On examples of these martyr inscriptions, Yasin 2009, 222–6.

97 *De lapsu Susannae (De lapsu virginis consecratae)*, originally attributed to Ambrose: ed. Cazzaniga 1948, trans. Tilley 2000, 223.

98 *CIL* 8, 17801.

99 Maxwell 2006, 88–117; also Haines-Eitzen 2009.

100 On access to different parts of the late antique church, Branham 1992; Gerstel 2006; Caseau 2016.

101 For example, Bailey 2016, 62, who bases her analysis on references in sermons: "even the main altar of a church was accessible to the laity outside of services. . . . It would have been very difficult for the clergy to control sacred space. . . . Lay people had many opportunities to make their own uses of it."

102 See Taft 1998; Caseau 2016, 61–3.

103 The specific occasions of the recitation of particular inscriptions has not been worked on at length for the late antique period, although see Yasin 2009: on the later Byzantine period, see Papalexandrou 2001, 2007; Spingou 2012; Drpić 2016a, 18–117; and for the medieval west, Debiais and Pallottini 2015.

104 On psalms and their association with particular dates in the liturgical calendar, see for example Krueger 2014. On epitaphs, especially Yasin 2005, 2009, 61–100.

105 On the sonic environments of late antique and Byzantine (Christian) spaces, Pentcheva 2011, 2017, 2018; Papalexandrou 2017; Haines-Eitzen 2017.
106 On the popularity of formulae across a broader segment of the population, Leatherbury 2016a. On the formation of the late antique (Christian) self, Krueger 2014.
107 E.g. James 2007b.
108 Hunger 1984.
109 Eastmond 2016; Rhoby 2017.
110 For an introduction to various conceptions of magic in the Roman and late antique periods, focused especially on small, portable objects (amulets, gems, rings, etc.) meant to protect the bearer, or to curse one's enemies, Maguire 1995; Janowitz 2002; Noegel, Walker, and Wheeler 2003; Karivieri 2010; Boschung and Bremmer 2015; Sanzo 2016. On "nonsense" inscriptions, sometimes made up of *charakteres*, signs that resemble, but that are not actually, letters, Frankfurter 1993; Foskolou 2014. Several mosaic pavements appear to feature signs related to the *charakteres*, including at Beth Hashitta and Khirbet Yattir: on these, see Talgam 2014, 249–52. Generally on mosaics and magic, Maguire 1994; Osborne 2014. One of the most common types of magical or apotropaic inscriptions from the Roman period was the inscription against envy, found in domestic and bath contexts: Dunbabin and Dickie 1983; Dunbabin 1989.
111 On dated inscriptions, Meimaris with Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou and Bougia 1992; Di Segni 1997a.

2 Material texts

When Christians walked into a church in the late antique period, they would have been overwhelmed by the colors of the numerous mosaics or paintings that surrounded them, as well as by the diverse types of materials on the walls, floors, and ceilings, materials that transformed sacred interiors into earthly imitations of heaven.[1] While it is impossible to partake in the same experience of the buildings today, the churches and chapels of Ravenna allow a contemporary viewer at least to imagine some of it, including the so-called Orthodox (or Neonian) Baptistery, a building whose decoration dates to the second half of the fifth century.[2] The decorative program has been the subject of several restoration campaigns since its creation, but it still manages to take the viewer's breath away.[3] In the brilliant glass mosaics of the dome above, a procession of saints encircles a scene of Christ's baptism, the whole encircled by a series of architectural vignettes framing empty thrones, altars, and open gospel books perched on stands; underneath, a row of white stuccoes of male figures – prophets, or perhaps saints – standing in niches would originally have been painted;[4] while on the walls of the drum mosaics made of blue and gold-glass tesserae alternate with polished marble revetment, bouncing light around the space **(Color Plate 2)**.

While officially used only once a year, on the eve of Easter Sunday, the building and its brilliant mosaics and marbles would have been appreciated fully both by new initiates to Christianity and by the bishop and priests presiding over the rites of baptism.[5] During the late afternoon, the soft glitter of the mosaics would have been magnified by daylight, which entered from the windows at the base of the dome and bounced around the glass mosaics, and at night the flickering light from oil lamps would have enlivened the space.[6] However, sight was not the only sense that would have been overwhelmed by the building. The faithful would have heard the priest preaching the baptismal rite, accompanied by the sound of sloshing water each time the initiates entered and left the central font, smelled the smell of incense and holy oil, touched the smooth marble of the walls (or, if they were being baptized, the water itself; and were touched by the priest in turn), and, immediately after they were baptized, tasted the blood (wine) and body (bread) of Christ for the first time.[7] Despite the sensory overload experienced by new initiates, they would almost certainly have noticed their colorful surroundings and taken to heart the images of holy figures who also acted as *exempla* for the lives

of devout Christians, most notably Christ Himself, whose posture the neophytes would have adopted as they climbed into the font. The participants in the ritual, especially the presiding priest, would also have appreciated the lengthy golden texts inscribed in mosaic on the interior arches that make up the lower zone of the wall.

In studies of interiors like that of the Orthodox Baptistery, art historians have made much of the role of the bright, colorful, and golden mosaics, focusing their attention on the "jeweled style" of the period.[8] This designation, popularized by Michael Roberts, allowed scholars to reclaim the value of the rich poetry of the period that valued the fragmentary quotation (usually derived from the works of classical authors) as well as lushly visual language, and which had previously been denigrated by classicists as "flowery" and "degraded" when compared to the poetry written in the first century during the reign of the emperor Augustus.[9] Since Roberts's examination was published, art historians have become increasingly interested in ancient uses and understandings of color, undertaking studies of the polychromy of statues,[10] the meanings of different color words, many of which were terms for groups of concepts rather than single ones, as well as technical investigations of the composition of pigments and glass.[11] Ancient artists, writers, and viewers seem to have valued the brilliance and shine of colorful materials more than they did their specific hue, though certain colors could still signify particular meanings to different audiences (we will return to some of these meanings shortly).[12] Some of the shinier works of art, glass mosaics, have proven a fertile ground for investigation of the production and reception of colorful images, including the light-reflecting properties of glass mosaics (especially gold-glass mosaics), which were set into curved spaces – domes, like that of the Orthodox Baptistery, but also apses, arches, and later, squinches – in order to take advantage of the ways in which light bounces off curved surfaces.[13] Within such spaces, the eye would move around and around the building while the mind contemplated the earthly beauty as well as the divine presence suggested by such an aesthetic of light and gold,[14] the golden grounds of wall mosaics perhaps perceived as the airy expanses of the sky or of heaven activated by the real light inside the church.[15] In certain light conditions, the marble floors beneath visitors' feet might seem as if they were water,[16] or the walls of bookmatched marble or *opus sectile* ("cut work") read as symbols of the wealth of the patron,[17] or as surfaces that dissolve the surface of the wall, possessing an almost magical artifice[18] and opening up a mystical experience of the church interior.[19] Besides being important participants in the broader "jeweled style" of the period, these elaborate interiors were influenced by (as well as played a large role in shaping) the "material turn" in late antiquity, a cultural development in the fourth century that saw an intensified appreciation amongst Christians for the materials and materiality of sacred spaces and objects.[20]

However, relatively little attention has been paid to the visuality and materiality of the texts placed at important and eminently visible locations within these spaces. This is a striking omission, especially in light of the recent focus on the materiality of texts in the Greek and Roman world, as well as the material powers

of Christian texts written on parchment, papyrus, metal, or ceramic.[21] As we have seen in the previous chapter, the inscriptions put up inside late pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim spaces were meant to be read, viewed, and interpreted by different audiences. As opposed to the dedicatory inscriptions of pagan temples – which were typically on the exterior and whose interiors were filled with inscribed dedications, many of which would have been too small to read or see properly, as well as inaccessible to the greater public – the texts written into sacred spaces from the fourth century onwards were produced in such a way that they grab the attention of the viewer, demanding that (s)he engage with them. These texts used a complex range of visual and material strategies in order to ensure that they got noticed, some of which are evident in the Orthodox Baptistery itself. The apostles who walk in procession in the dome are each named in golden capital letters. Longer golden texts placed along the lunettes of the walls, added in the sixth century, quote or paraphrase passages from the Psalms or the Gospels connected to the symbolic meanings of baptism **(Color Plate 3)**: for example, over the northeast apsidiole, the inscription presents a paraphrase of the Gospel of John 13:4–5, "Where Jesus laid aside his clothing and put water in a basin and washed the feet of his disciples," presenting the biblical basis for the foot-washing that appears to have been part of the baptismal rite.[22]

While many of these textual strategies are based upon Roman precedents – to be expected, as the production of inscriptions in the ancient world involved a standardized set of practices passed down from specialist to specialist – the epigraphic strategies with which we are concerned reveal the influence of intervening cultural, religious, and aesthetic developments, especially the increased emphasis on color and brilliance and the new power of the word or "Word" in the period.[23] Viewing and reading these colorful texts is crucial because the inscriptions were not just reflective of wider attitudes towards texts and materials, they also played a role in shaping them. By "reading" the colors and materials of inscriptions, as well as the ways in which other literary texts and (most importantly) the inscriptions themselves narrate their own materiality, we get glimpses of the importance of materials for viewers, but also of the strikingly different attitudes towards these material texts held by different individuals and groups, all of which illuminate tensions between the visible, material world (of which building interiors were a part, if a glorious one) and the immaterial sphere of the divine.

First, this chapter considers the visual strategies that late antique artists used to draw attention to inscribed texts, including color choices, contrast between text and ground, the use of register lines, the highlighting of important words, and the employment of different materials. While all of these practices had Graeco-Roman precedents and were used across different mediums, late antique mosaicists exploited the full range of effects of their medium to guide readers to certain phrases or words, link words together to magnify their meanings, or increase the memorability of texts. Second, the chapter then (briefly) leaves these material texts behind and examines the broader tension between (textual) materiality and immateriality in the period. Elites were concerned not only about the permanence of their inscribed dedications, but also about their appropriateness, as fancy

texts written in golden letters could be viewed by some as a misuse of resources. However, while the Church Fathers continued to express their misgivings about elaborate inscriptions deep into the period, the vast majority of patrons (and artists) chose to use colorful texts to record their donations and prayers, signifying the power of these material texts as bright, enlivened statements of faith. Third, we focus on mosaic inscriptions that use their own stone or glass materiality as metaphors for the unwavering ("stony") faith of patrons and congregations, for the light of the divine, and for epiphanic viewing. By reflexively describing their own materials and using them as metaphors, these texts highlight their own embedded states and play with their fragmentary properties (as texts made up of pieces) and precious materials. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the popular trope of "painting in colors," used by a number of the inscriptions, which links form to color (as color defined form in the ancient world) and highlights similarities and differences between mediums, begging the question of the relationship between these often formulaic texts and the images within and next to which they were placed. This chapter argues for a new understanding of these inscriptions as part of a system of signs whose verbal, visual, and material components were fully integrated in the service of their complicated, multivalent messages.

The colors and surfaces of texts

Thousands of inscribed texts survive from the sacred spaces of late antiquity. Executed in a range of media and techniques, including mosaic, carved stone, and painting, these texts were placed on all surfaces of the interiors (and, sometimes, the exteriors) of churches and synagogues. The vast majority of these texts, regardless of their medium, were executed in black or in red writing on a light-colored ground, typically made of off-white limestone (in the case of mosaics), marble or wood (in the case of carved inscriptions), or paint on plaster (in the case of painted texts).[24] It is impossible to accurately measure the number of painted inscriptions due to the loss of paint caused by the elements as well as by overly aggressive cleaning in the modern period, but it would appear that many texts were in fact colorful in the period, even texts carved deeply into their stone supports or in high relief.[25] Depending on how they were applied, these colors may have either emphasized or suppressed the play of light and shadow on carved or relief letters, including those of the famous sixth-century dedicatory inscription from the Church of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople (Figure 2.1). Proclaiming the accomplishments of Anicia Juliana, patron of the church, the relief letters of the text stand out from their ground (which was originally painted a deep blue), creating the effect of drama and even movement as lighting conditions changed throughout the day and as viewers moved around the interior of the church, highlighting the bodies of the letters against the shadows of their deeply cut outlines.[26] The text of the inscription itself plays with the brightness of the church's interior, referring to the church as a "shining house"[27] with a gilded ceiling,[28] that was brilliant in both daytime and nighttime, and turning light into a powerful symbol for the glory of Juliana's dynasty (the "holy all-golden light" of her imperial forefather, Theodosius II).[29]

Figure 2.1 Fragment of the carved dedicatory inscription from Hagios Polyeuktos, Constantinople, 520s, now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum

Source: Photograph by author

Relief inscriptions were not only used on buildings, but were also written onto other surfaces, such as wooden lintels,[30] as well as metal, glass, and ceramic vessels, their texts either cast in molds or (in the case of metal objects) hammered from the reverse of the object (the repoussé technique), as on silver chalices used during the liturgy.[31] Even if some of these texts were painted, as seems likely, their tactile qualities were appreciated in the period, as is attested by an unusual episode in an anonymous Syriac chronicle of the early sixth century (sometimes attributed to "Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite") in which the author, an eyewitness to the wars between Byzantium and Persia, records an episode in which a goose lays not a golden egg, but one emblazoned with a relief inscription:

> let me put down the very words of the letter which came to us, which are as follows:**
>
> > "Listen now to a miracle and (an occasion) . . . *we saw it with our eyes, touched it <with our hands>, and read it with our lips* . . . a goose laid an egg, and on it were inscribed elegant and readable Greek characters. They formed, so to speak, the body of that egg and were *embossed for*

> *[sight] and touch, like the characters which monks [inscribe] on the cups [or communion plate] of the (Eucharistic) blessing, and their form was perceivable even to the blind*. They were (set out) in this manner: a cross was engraved on the side of the egg, and going all the way round the egg until it came back to the cross was written (the word) 'The Romans'. There was also another cross engraved (on it), and (right round the egg) until it got back to (the cross) was written (the word) 'will conquer'. The crosses were engraved one above the other, as the words were written one above the other. No Christian or Jew seeing this miracle would stop his mouth (showing forth God's) praise, but we are not so presumptuous as to imitate the characters which the hand of God inscribed inside the womb (of the goose), for they are very beautiful. Let anyone who hears (of this) be assured (of its truth) without doubt."
>
> These are the words of the letter from the Zeugmatites.[32]

This inscription in relief, carved by the hand of God Himself, employs the language and symbols of the miraculous fourth-century vision of the emperor Constantine, who, according to Eusebius, saw an inscribed cross of light in the sky just before his victory over Maxentius outside of Rome, to predict the divinely ordained victory of the Byzantines over the Persians.[33] The miraculous production of this inscribed text, and its Constantinian roots, are fascinating, but even more unique is the focus of the narrator on the relief character of the inscription, which was "embossed" just like the inscription on a silver liturgical vessel, such as an oil flask now in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore (Figure 2.2), so that literate viewers could read it (the Greek characters were "elegant and readable") and that blind people could make out the forms of the letters through touch.[34] Strikingly, the relief format of the text is used as evidence that the inscription was divine in origin, as the shell of a goose egg, though thicker than that of a chicken egg, could not be expected to withstand the pressure necessary to excavate such a text from its surface. While this account is unique, it seems to indicate that at least some viewers appreciated the tactile nature of the text, which was seen, touched, and read aloud ("read . . . with our lips"), confirming the sacred power and authority of the divinely transmitted inscription.[35] Although most viewers could not touch the relief inscriptions on buildings – the Polyeuktos inscription, for example, was placed on the interior arcade of the building, out of reach – their three-dimensional forms were appreciated not just for their dramatic play with light, but also for the sense that one could reach out and touch them.

On inscriptions on which some color is preserved, black and red are the most popular colors. Their popularity was the result of several factors, including their availability – they were most readily available colors of paint and of stone tesserae – but also their visual effect and cultural associations.[36] By painting or laying a text in mosaic in black or red, artists created a strong contrast between texts and their grounds, which were most often a lighter color, grabbing the attention of the passing viewer and enhancing the legibility of the texts themselves,

Figure 2.2 Silver flask with Christ, the Virgin, and saints, from Kaper Koraon, Syria, late sixth century, Walters Art Museum 57.639

Source: The Walters Art Museum, acquired by Henry Walters, 1929, photo under CC0 license

and reminding us of the ancient concern with brightness or luminosity over specific hue.[37] Black-colored inscriptions, such as the name labels ("Lighthouse (of) Alexandria," "Memphis") that hover over the cities in the mosaic from Gerasa, depicted in Figure 1.1, may be considered the most basic types of colorful inscriptions. The simple and graphic contrast of the black text on the off-white ground made the text clearly decipherable, and allowed text to act as text, though of course its letters could still be adorned with serifs, punctuated with decorative elements, and surrounded by ornate frames (an issue we will return to in the next chapter**)**. Other texts were colored white,[38] yellow,[39] blue and green,[40] and even gold, a color and material to which we will return shortly.

Other than black inscriptions, the most popular color for inscriptions appears to have been red,[41] such as the mosaic dedicatory inscription from the Church of St. George at Khirbat al-Samra in Jordan **(Color Plate 4)**.[42] This late sixth- or early seventh-century inscription, framed doubly within a guilloche and a square, and placed in the central nave where viewers could easily see it, was executed in two shades of red, a darker shade for the first three lines (and the cross above the text) and a lighter, more orange-tinged shade for the final six lines. Did viewers engage with them differently because of their color?

To begin to answer these questions, we must turn to ancient texts that describe the colors of written texts, as color and its meanings are deeply culturally coded.[43] Writing in different shades and varieties of red was a fairly standard practice in the Roman world, especially in the medium of painting. In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder describes the origin and use of *minium* (red lead), a pigment that was used to paint inscriptions on walls and objects, as well as to color carved inscriptions.[44] During Pliny's time, the production of *minium* was apparently quite heavily regulated by the Roman state, which also set the price ceiling for the pigment.[45] After describing the use of the pigment by painters on walls and on objects, Pliny enumerates how the pigment is used for writing: "*Minium* is used in books for writing, and makes letters clearer (or brighter, *clariores*) either on the wall or in marble, and even on tombs."[46] While different types of inscriptions were writ in red in the Roman period – Pliny mentions painted and carved texts, including dedications and funerary inscriptions – pigments are quite vulnerable to the elements, and only a relatively small number of red or red-enhanced inscriptions survive today, including examples of electoral inscriptions from the buried city of Pompeii, which acted as political advertisements **(Color Plate 5)**.[47]

Minium and other cheaper red pigments, including red ocher and cinnabar, continued to be used in late antiquity to highlight both painted and carved inscriptions. While surviving painted inscriptions are few and far between due to their exposure to the elements as well as the lack of preserved walls from the majority of sacred sites under discussion (an issue discussed in Chapter 1), several sites preserve evidence that painting texts onto the walls and architectural elements of churches and synagogues remained a popular practice. Some of these *dipinti* are black, but many are painted in red pigment, including a range of "planned" (official) inscriptions and graffiti from churches, chapels, and monasteries in Arabia, Palestine, and Egypt.[48]

Some of the most striking survivals of painted texts from the period come from a synagogue at Rehov in the Jordan Valley, where, in the fifth- or sixth-century renovation of the synagogue, artists used red paint to write numerous texts onto the plaster of the walls and the columns.[49] These texts included dedicatory inscriptions, prayers, a list of the Jewish priestly courses (hereditary orders of priests descended from biblical times), and a lengthy inscription that relates to the system of religious tithes, the latter of which was later copied in black mosaic tesserae onto the floor of the synagogue's narthex.[50] While these inscriptions have not yet been fully published, one of the texts, currently on display in the Israel Museum, is a dedicatory inscription that packs a visual punch, framed by a *tabula ansata* within a wreath, and that would have attracted the eyes of those within the building.[51] Red paint was also used to highlight carved inscriptions, including those carved on limestone door lintels from churches such as the fifth- or sixth-century South Church at Shivta, in the Negev Desert, on which both the Greek inscription and the decorative elements, including a central cross-framed doubly by an eight-pointed star and a wreath as well as grapevines and birds, are decorated with red pigment **(Color Plate 6)**.[52] Even though this lintel is in a fragmentary state, and the reddish color is only partially preserved, we can understand at least some fraction of the original visual impact of the added color, which makes the text and surrounding decoration "pop" against a pale background.

While the visual effects of inscriptions painted red with *minium* and other similar pigments seem to us today to be fairly matte ones when read under museum lights or *in situ*, for some viewers the red color of written texts was more brilliant. Pliny himself points out the effect that the red pigment had on the visibility of letters: it makes them *clariores*, a word sometimes translated as "clearer" but that might also signify "brighter" or "more brilliant." Here, Pliny seems to suggest that under the right lighting conditions, and because of their contrast against their white or off-white backgrounds, red texts could seem to shine forth from their supports. While few late antique authors discuss the colors of texts, a small handful of mentions are notable, including the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus, a lengthy epic poem about the life of Dionysus written in Egypt in the fifth century CE.[53] In Book Twelve, the author describes a complex scene set in the heavenly palace of the sun god, Helios, in which one of the goddesses of the Seasons (appropriately, the season of grape tending and winemaking) reads the mystical Tablets of Phanes, inscribed prophecies in text and image set up by the legendary first-born god, that predict the fate of the universe. The content of these tablets is fairly opaque, but what is most interesting for our purposes is the visual and material language that Nonnus uses to describe their (imaginary) texts. These texts, which Nonnus envisions as written onto tablets (κύρβιας) hung onto the walls of the palace, and written upon in colors (ποίκιλλεν, a cognate of the noun ποικιλία, a term to which we will return towards the end of the chapter),[54] described the world's fate "in reddened letters, inscribed with the artist's red ochre."[55] Here, Nonnus uses two words to describe a different substance from that used by Pliny, μίλτος (not *minium*), to refer to the mineral pigment in which the texts were painted (a material that Pliny refers to as *rubrica*, from which we get the term "rubric," used to describe the

addition of red headings or sections of text to manuscripts in the Middle Ages).[56] While Nonnus does not say that his red texts "shine," he emphasizes the visual power of their color through repetition: they are made of "red letters" written in "red ochre," and are texts that pack a divine punch.

Might late antique viewers have perceived red texts, even ones written in matte paint or stone tesserae, as shiny ones? While the evidence for the reception of such texts is quite thin, there appears to have been some hint that red inscriptions were viewed as bright ones, attracting attention and even glowing from their positions on walls, floors, and objects. As we have seen, colors were often appreciated for their brilliance rather than their hue in antiquity.[57] In fact, red, one of the classical primary colors,[58] was viewed as a luminous color closely related to gold: in the medium of mosaic, gold mosaics were often embedded in a red-painted ground in order to enhance their fiery brilliance, a practice (and relationship) to which the inscriptions themselves seem to refer when they describe the "reddish shine" of golden mosaics (*rutilant*).[59] As Christians regarded gold, red, and purple colors as earthly reflections of different aspects of divine light, it is perhaps not surprising that red texts could be seen to shine forth actively from their supports.[60]

Texts from explicitly Christian contexts also hint at the special vividness of red texts, including an episode in the *Miracles of Ss. Cyrus and John*, composed in the seventh century by Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, which records the healing of a blind man named John:

> Having gotten up from sleep and from his bed in the middle of the night, and taking *sinopia* (the color of which was the same as fire), he wrote these words here where he was lying down onto the wall close to the door of the *temenos* [church]: "I, John from the city of Rome, a blind man who endured patiently for eight years, recovered my sight here through the power of Saints Cyrus and John."[61]

In this extraordinary episode, which preserves all of the immediacy of John's healing and subsequent act of writing on the wall, we are told that the healed man writes with *sinopia*, the reddish-brown pigment also known as red ocher often used to make the preparatory drawings for paintings or mosaics.[62] While not as expensive a pigment as *minium*, the pigment was nonetheless vivid, the "color . . . of fire (φλογί)." The saints' shrine, at Menouthis just outside of Alexandria in Egypt, does not survive, but we may imagine that its walls were covered with similarly brilliant red texts memorializing the miraculous healings of many devotees, shining forth from the wall as if they were lit with divine fire and giving hope to those around the shrine who were still waiting for their own miracles to happen.[63] Such shiny effects were perhaps not reserved for painted texts alone, and could have been associated with testimonies of healing or prayers written in mosaic, as in the Khirbat al-Samra church, or even in ceramic, as on the extraordinary red tile inscriptions that run along the outer walls of the fifth-century Church of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste at Saranda, in southern Albania, which record the prayers of donors in letters around 20 cm tall: "Lord, help your servant Theodoros"

(Color Plate 7).[64] By executing these prayers, which doubled as donor inscriptions, in red paint, mosaic, or, as at Saranda, in brick, artists and their patrons meant to draw visual attention to them, but also to strengthen the texts' powers as witnesses or prayers to the divine through their color and materials.

Colorful texts and their contexts

While some red texts may have seemed to shine forth from their pale supports, other inscriptions reveal the use of a wide range of visual and material strategies that drew on the powers of color.[65] These strategies drew on classical epigraphic ones, but greatly expanded the range of colors used, turning text into multicolored ornament while preserving and even heightening the legibility of words. Some inscriptions were written in alternating lines of red and black, most strikingly in the late sixth-century Church of the Priest Waʾil at Umm al-Rasas (Kastron Mefaa) near Madaba, in Jordan, using a Graeco-Roman epigraphic technique to differentiate the lines of text from each other and to ease the task of the reader and perhaps increase his or her ability to retain the text in his or her memory **(Color Plate 8)**.[66] Similar red-black alternation is visible in a number of North African mosaic epitaphs, allowing families to distinguish the memorials of their loved ones from others.[67] A number of variations of this technique were available to mosaicists and painters and/or their patrons, including the alternation of red and blue, or even more strikingly, of bright red and green.[68] This type of rubrication – coloring the first line or alternating lines of a text red – continued to be used in different mediums, especially manuscripts, through the Middle Ages and into the early modern period,[69] its popularity ensured by the decorative impact of the strategy, which both pleased readers visually and enhanced their ability to read and remember texts.[70]

Late antique authors, as well as the later copyists of their manuscripts, used this same method of alternation, occasionally varying the colors of letters or words to convey even more complicated Christian visual messages. Although not a text on a building, the red letters within the fourth-century poems penned by the author Optatian Porphyry, which form images – of crosses, of instruments – as well as of words, reveal something of the heightened awareness of color that writers (and readers) possessed in the period.[71] The red letters of one of Optatian's poems, from a series of poems praising the emperor Constantine, form a complicated sequence of images of a boat with a mast in the form of a Chi-Rho (one of the symbols for Christ, possibly celebrating the naval victory won by Constantine's son Crispus at the battle of Chrysopolis) as well as the words *VOT(IS) XX* (referencing the *vicennalia* of Constantine, the celebration of the anniversary of his twentieth year as emperor) (Figure 2.3).[72] Optatian makes clear that one should turn to these red letters for the encapsulated meaning of the poem, which itself begins: "The heavenly signs will be revealed by reading the red text" (*Prodentur* ***minio*** *caelestia signa legenti* . . . , where the poet uses the term for red lead, *minium*). For not only do these red letters themselves stand out against the black background of the rest of the text, they also read as separate in-texts (*versus intexti*) themselves:

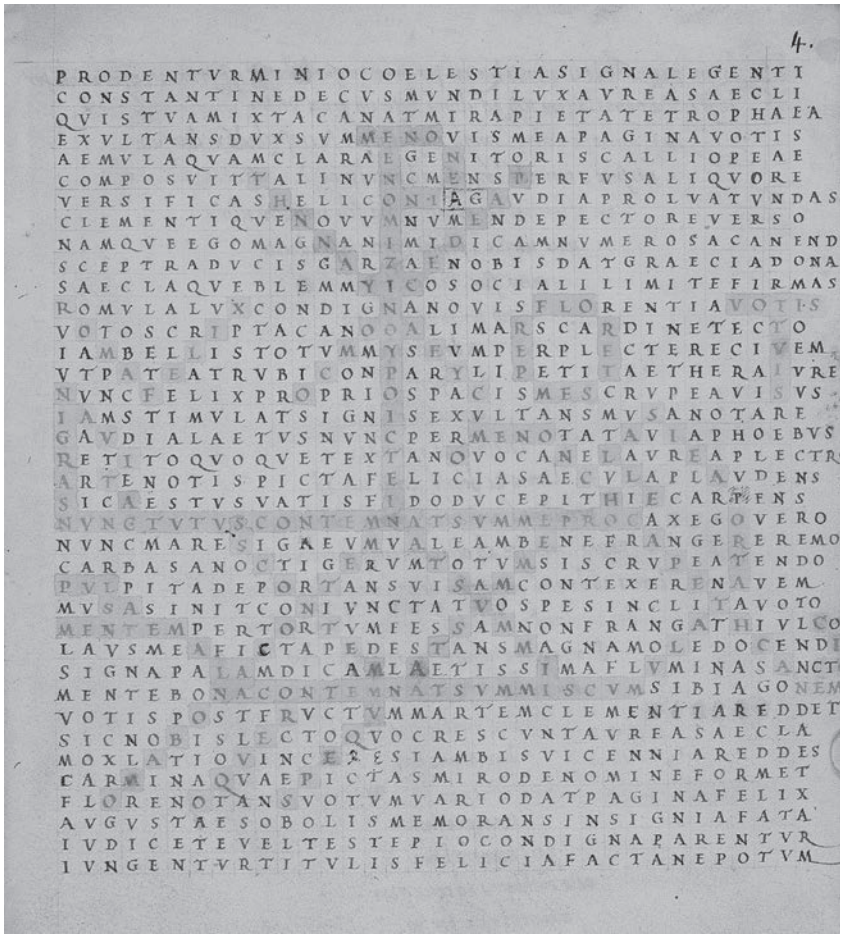

Figure 2.3 Optatian, Poem 19, folio 4r from Codex Augustaneus 9 Guelferbytanus, sixteenth century

Source: Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: Cod. Guelf. 9 Aug 4⁰

the boat with three of its oars reads as an exhortatory poem against bad fortune;[73] the image of the word *VOT(IS)* spells out a wish for Rome's good fortune;[74] and the Chi-Rho mast and the longest oar of the ship explains (in Greek!) how to read the image of ship as symbol: "One must think that the ship is the universe (*kosmos*), and that you are the hoisted rigging, tautened by the strong winds of your virtue."[75] Written by a master of verbal games and of the play between visual and verbal, Optatian's poem experiments with alternation, between black and red, from text to image and back, and between Latin and Greek (as well as between different types of verse, from Greek elegiac to Latin hexameter), encouraging the reader to

vacillate back and forth between different modes of reading and seeing, in which groups of letters become images that can also be read as words.[76] While written onto parchment, these poems could "shine" forth from their pages through their use of color alternation.[77]

Other (simpler, prose) texts reverse the typical contrast between dark text and lighter ground, as in the church at Kursi on the Sea of Galilee, whose late sixth-century dedicatory inscription, placed immediately inside the doorway to the baptistery south of the sanctuary, was executed in white tesserae on a bright red ground **(Color Plate 9)**.[78] At Kursi, despite the fact that the white limestone tesserae are the same color as those used for the rest of the pavement of the room, the white text and the red ground both seem to shine forth from the floor due to the strong light-dark contrast between them. The visual play of the white letters on the dark background continued to be popular in churches into the early medieval period, as in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua in the Roman Forum, where a white inscription on a dark red-purple ground was erected in the presbytery as part of the early eighth-century decorative program by Pope John VII.[79] In the period, white was seen as the brightest, but also most brilliant color, especially when emphasized by contrast with a darker color.[80] For some more elite viewers, as well as for the clergy, this play between light (bright) text on red (dark) ground must have echoed the effect of letters written in silver or gold ink onto the purple-dyed parchment pages of books produced for royalty or high-ranking clergymen such as the Rossano Gospels **(Color Plate 10)**.[81] By placing brilliant texts on richly colored grounds, patrons and artists were able to make their texts blaze forth, as if the white tesserae or pigment were in fact made of more precious substances. These white or other light-colored texts were also placed on even darker grounds, especially in the medium of mosaic.[82] Both of these visual formats – black and red alternation, and light texts on dark grounds – were used for mosaic and painted inscriptions from the Roman period (and earlier) onwards, revealing a remarkable degree of aesthetic continuity between classical and late antique tastes and techniques despite the novelty of the white-on-red/purple format.

Painters and mosaicists also incorporated color into their texts through prominently colored guidelines. Many inscriptions from both the eastern and western Mediterranean feature these ruled lines, originally used by stonecutters to separate the texts into organized registers.[83] These lines, which could be chiseled lightly or more deeply on the stone, continued to be used in the production of carved texts in late antiquity. Even more strikingly, late Roman mosaicists took up the practice, incorporating colorful guidelines into mosaic inscriptions.[84] This transfer of practice from one medium to another is interesting because mosaicists did not have to use mosaic guidelines, but could instead have simply drawn them onto the bedding or used lines of single tesserae of the same color as the rest of the ground (as in the Kursi inscription, where the lines and the ground are the same shade of red), which separate the lines of text but blend into the background rather than drawing the eye.

In other inscriptions, the guidelines only slightly differ in color from the ground: witness the dedicatory inscription of Eupithis from the pavement of the

fourth-century synagogue at Apamea in Syria **(Color Plate 11)**, whose guidelines are executed in tesserae of a very pale yellow stone that is only a shade or two darker than the white tesserae that make up the rest of the ground of the rectangular inscription panel.[85] At Apamea, the inscription – written in black stone tesserae – is emphasized by its stark graphic contrast with its ground and guidelines, especially when viewed against the larger pavement in which it is set, which is made up of a brightly colored zigzag pattern of white, yellow (the same stone as the guidelines), pink, pale green, and orange. Other mosaic inscriptions from the same synagogue, all written in black tesserae and now split between the National Museum in Damascus and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels, employ differently colored guidelines: the two longest (and largest) dedicatory inscriptions, each framed in a *tabula ansata* and placed on the western side of the floor, use lines of different colors, one dark gray[86] and one red;[87] while other texts feature red guidelines.[88] Some of the texts feature no guidelines at all, but are executed in red letters instead of black ones, including the series of dedicatory inscriptions in the pavement immediately to the north of the main room of the synagogue (Figure 2.4).[89] Although the grounds of all of these panels are white, the colors of the texts and guidelines of the different dedicatory inscriptions, all of which are otherwise fairly similar in language and content, allow some of inscriptions to act

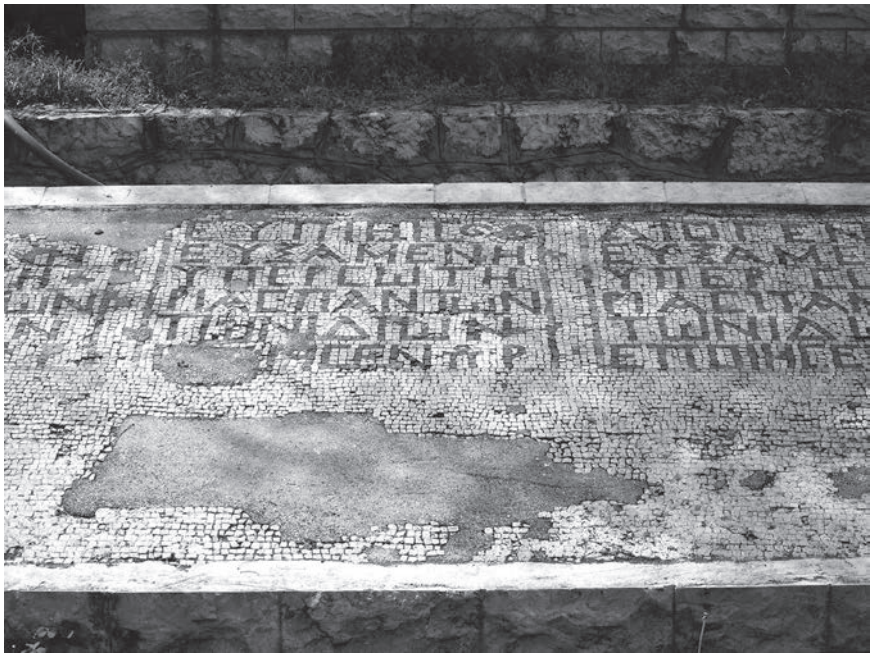

Figure 2.4 Mosaic dedications, pavement of the synagogue at Apamea, Syria, fourth century, now in the National Museum, Damascus

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

as singular documents (in the case of the two *tabulae*-framed dedicatory inscriptions with differently colored groundlines), marking them out for the reader as exceptional, while others, including the sequence of texts written in red, act as serial texts and link their donors together.

While painters and other producers of inscriptions all played with the contrast between text and ground, certain strategies seem to have been particular to the more flexible medium of mosaic. A number of mosaic inscriptions play with these colors and others to pick out particular words, either to draw attention to them or to connect them together, privileging a particular interpretation of the text. The majority of surviving texts that display this strategy of the manipulation of different colors (and, often, of different materials) for emphasis are in fact the numerous funerary mosaic inscriptions from the floors of churches in North Africa. As these texts were similar in content, and were densely packed together on the floors of churches, mosaicists often wrote them in color to draw the attention of readers/viewers.[90] Some epitaphs featured playful variations on the strategy of color alternation, as does the "*Theodoulos*" inscription from a cemetery at Sousse, now in the Sousse Museum, where the name or epithet ("Servant of God") of the patron (or artist?) is written in alternating letters of light-blue (glass?), red, pink, and gray tesserae **(Color Plate 12)**.[91] Surviving examples from the eastern Mediterranean are much more rare, but include a short Armenian mosaic inscription from the pavement of a fifth-century monastery on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem in which the initial cross (a device often used to begin inscriptions) is written in red tesserae, the name and (now fragmentary) title of the patron (or possibly the deceased), "Grigor" written in black, and the sacred name of "Christ" written in red.[92] In this text, red is used only for a sacred symbol (the cross) and name, allowing the reader to differentiate between earthly and heavenly persons.

Most inscribed texts made up of alternating colors are clearly written to emphasize certain words or parts of words, but others are harder to interpret in context, such as the large mosaic inscription from a Christian cemetery at Tipasa, in Algeria, which invokes peace and harmony during the commemorative meal held to remember and celebrate the deceased, a tradition that was carried over from the Roman period **(Color Plate 13)**.[93] The text, written in light gray, black, and red on a white ground embedded within a marine scene, reveals a playful alternation of colors that do not seem to emphasize a particular reading. At the top of the panel, the words "In (the name of) Christ, God" (*In Chr(ist)o Deo*) are written in gray and red, with gray tesserae (on a white ground) used for "in" and (on a blue ground) for the christogram (Chi-Rho) that would have been read as the word "Christ" (with an "o" strangely tacked onto the right side of the symbol), while the word "God" is written with two red letters (*DEo*) and a single (final) gray one (*deO*). While the red initial letters in the word "God" may have acted as a kind of rubric, drawing attention to the sacred name in a similar way to that of the inscription from Jerusalem, and red dots are used to punctuate the text clearly, the alternation in the rest of the inscription is even more odd: the majority of the text, which invokes peace and concord upon the funerary meal, is written in light gray; but in the second line, the text switches to black in the middle of the word "feast" (*CONVivio*).[94]

This alternation certainly draws the eye, but in fact makes *reading* the text more difficult, suggesting that the mosaicist who wrote these words may have been only semi-literate or, perhaps, that the attention-grabbing function of the first part of the word *convivio* was more important than the legibility of the entire word.

Glassy words

Perhaps even more striking are the floor mosaic inscriptions written partially or entirely in glass tesserae. Inscriptions were not the only features of floor mosaics in the period that included glass: in fact, mosaicists all around the Mediterranean used glass tesserae (especially greens, blues, and oranges) to expand the range of colors available to them as well as to create sparkling, jewel-like optical effects within images and designs.[95] Writing on the floor in glass, though seemingly an unusual practice in the period based upon the small number of surviving examples, was used to similar effect, ensuring that the inscribed text shimmered against a matte stone ground.[96] Several extant epitaphs of Christians from catacombs at the Tunisian sites of Lemta (Leptiminus), Kélibia,[97] and Sousse, including the epitaph of Hermes from Sousse **(Color Plate 14)**,[98] bear witness to the practice of writing part or the whole of epitaphs in glass tesserae, typically a light bluish or greenish glass. These glass inscriptions almost flagrantly demonstrate their precious and relatively expensive materiality, as glass is a much less durable substance than stone, evidenced by the poor condition of the Hermes inscription, a text that is effaced even as one reads (and walks over) it. Through their very fragility, the glass materials of the text enhance the stature of the deceased and ensure that readers/viewers would have been drawn to the subtle glimmer of the inscriptions against the matte stone ground, the effect amplified by the flickering oil lamps used in the catacombs. A single example from a Jewish context in the eastern Mediterranean, in the synagogue at Issfiya (Huseifa) in Israel, demonstrates the use of a similar strategy: the Aramaic invocation "Peace be upon Israel" in the pavement.[99]

Other inscriptions from North Africa include glass tesserae of varied colors. A single short epitaph from a church at Pupput, a site on the coast of modern Tunisia, which records the burial of the young unbaptized girl Donata, shows a remarkable attention to colors and materials **(Color Plate 15)**.[100] The text, "May Donata, innocent child, live in peace," is written in fairly standard materials – gray tesserae on a white ground, surrounded by a multicolored border – but the letters of the first line, containing the name of the deceased (*Donata innox*), are highlighted with deep green, blue, and orange glass tesserae. While the inscription is damaged, as glass tesserae are more vulnerable to the ravages of time, each letter of the first line appears to have been executed in gray stone tesserae first, with the glass tesserae used to highlight the letters, either in green (*DoNATA iNNoX*), blue and orange (*dOnata InnOx*), or blue and green (e.g. the "T" in *donaTa*). The coloristic variation in the first line of the epitaph was consciously planned: the green was used most liberally to adorn the letters, while the complementary colors blue and orange (the latter of which takes on the appearance of gold both *in situ*

and in photographs) were used in combination, playing off each other to great effect. At Pupput, the contrast between the rich colors of the glass and the muted gray and white of the stone text and ground, as well as between the shiny glass and matte stone, forces the reader/viewer to look at *this* inscription, reading its simple formulae in a new light as the donation of a wealthy family who wanted to give their daughter a unique memorial. Unfortunately, the original location of the panel in the church floor is not known, but as it is the only epitaph from the site to feature glass tesserae, even semi-literate or illiterate viewers would have been drawn to the decorative qualities of Donata's epitaph, whose appearance would have changed throughout the day depending on the lighting conditions.

Occasionally, in addition to colored glass, glass mixed with a precious metal, often gold, was used to elevate certain texts. This use was not unique to inscriptions, as gold-glass tesserae were also used to add shine and splendor to images of precious objects: the jeweled necklace of a richly dressed female personification,[101] for example, or an expensive musical instrument.[102] While gold was used sparingly in inscriptions on floors, as may be expected, the golden texts that survive show a remarkable intelligence and care in their use of colors and materials. One extraordinary donor inscription from the early fourth-century basilica of St. Paul at Philippi in Greece, written in a rich array of gold, red, and dark blue tesserae, reads: "Bishop Porphyrios made the mosaic of the basilica of Paul in (the name of) Christ" **(Color Plate 16)**.[103] Only the names of the donor ("Bishop Porphyrios"), Paul, and Christ are executed in gold-paste tesserae (against a dark gray stone ground), while the rest of the inscription is of blue stone tesserae against a white ground, except for important connective word, "in (the name of) (ἐν)," which is written in red stone tesserae.[104] As in the case of the Armenian inscription from Jerusalem, discussed already, where red was used for the sacred symbol and name, the gold in the Philippi inscription highlights the important names within the text, materially connecting Porphyrios with St. Paul and Christ, and elevating all three names through their own fabrics of composition.

Precious materialities

Because of their shine and glimmer, the "in-your-face" materiality of metallic texts like that at Philippi would seem to have had the greatest impact upon viewers. The substances of these inscriptions are related to those of the texts of expensive books written in gold and silver inks on richly dyed purple parchment, produced from at least the fourth century onwards.[105] However, even closer in context and meaning are the metallic letters used to write monumental honorific inscriptions onto the stone supports of public building façades and monuments in urban settings, especially triumphal arches, in order to memorialize and praise the names of (mostly imperial) patrons. These were typically made of bronze or, more exceptionally, of gilded bronze, the so-called *litterae aureae*.[106] Because of the value of their metallic materials, most of these letters were removed from their monuments in antiquity and melted down, though on some monuments the letter-shaped grooves meant to hold the bronze letters can still be read as ghosts of the

Figure 2.5 Dedication inscription (missing original bronze letters), Arch of Constantine, Rome, 315

Source: Photograph by author

original letters, as on the Arch of Constantine, whose two identical inscriptions in monumental capitals on either side of the arch continue to proclaim the merits of the emperor (Figure 2.5).[107] In its original gleaming golden bronze letters, the text would have made visible the emperor's grandeur, piety, divine inspiration, and status as savior of the empire (all mentioned in the inscription), making these qualities material objects through its own precious substance, a material that would have conveyed a number of associations to Roman viewers, including wealth, elite status, and even divinity or semi-divinity, viewing the imperial patron as closer to the gods (Figure 2.6).[108]

Roman temples often featured bronze and gilt bronze inscriptions on their exterior façades, most typically along the architrave over the entrance, such as the inscription on the façade of the Pantheon in Rome, considered in the previous chapter.[109] Another paradigmatic text is that whose afterimage (*sans* bronze) can still be read over the entrance to the small Temple of Augustus at Pula (Roman Pola), Croatia, built in the early first century CE: "To Rome and Augustus Caesar, son of a god [the deified Julius Caesar], father of the fatherland."[110] For the most part, these dedicatory texts were short and simple and featured many abbreviations, enhancing their brilliant iconic power. Even in the early Byzantine period, these bronze texts embedded into stone were remembered for their antiquity and their power: for example, in his sixth-century *Chronicle*, John Malalas reports an

Figure 2.6 Gilded bronze letters from the Hadrianic Gate at Antalya, Turkey, c. 130, now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Source: Photograph by Butko, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 generic license

inscription above the door of the Temple of Rhea at Cyzicus, in northwestern Turkey, written "in bronze letters embedded into stone, that is to say into marble" that was thought to record the prophecy of the Pythian Oracle given to Jason and the Argonauts.[111] For Malalas and other Christian authors, the materials of Greek or Roman texts, as well as their locations, testified to their antiquity and authenticity. In some cases, inscriptions continued to be produced in this fashion in both western Europe, as at the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno in Italy,[112] and in the eastern Mediterranean, as is attested by a remarkable survival from the Umayyad "desert castle" of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi in Syria, where the eighth-century foundation inscription of the caliph Hisham is written in Arabic in *litterae aureae* on the lintel over the main entrance to the complex.[113]

After the turn of the fourth century, Christian Romans adopted these golden inscriptions and brought them inside their sacred spaces, writing texts into the fabric of buildings in metallic mosaic.[114] Both gold and silver tesserae – made of a thin layer of the metal sandwiched between two layers of glass – were used to write dedicatory and prayer inscriptions onto the walls and floors.[115] We have already seen gold tesserae used to highlight names, as in the epitaph of Donata from Pupput, and to link together important names (of Christ, of donors), as in the fourth-century Basilica of St. Paul at Philippi, one of the earliest extant examples of a text inscribed in gold mosaic. Gold tesserae were also used to write two dedicatory inscriptions onto the floor of the early fifth-century Basilica alla Beligna, where gold letters against a blue-glass ground record the donors' names and the

number of feet of mosaic for which they paid.[116] Even more striking is the golden inscription from the pavement of the apse of fifth-century basilica at Salona (Solin) in Croatia, set into a dark ground, which praises the patrons of the church:

> *Nova post vetera*
> *coepit Synferius*,
> *Esychius eius nepos*
> *cum clero et populo fecit*.
> *Haec munera*
> *domus, Chr(ist)e, grata*
> *tene!*
>
> Synferius began the new after the old, and Hesychius his grandson finished it with the clergy and the people. Christ, accept this house as pleasing gifts![117]

The use of gold for this text is especially appropriate, as it emphasizes the shiny novelty of the new church that is explicated in the first line of the inscription ("the new after the old," *nova post vetera*), a golden "new" interior that should never tarnish or rust.

The first metallic inscriptions to survive from the walls of Christian buildings also date to the late fourth or early fifth century, including the inscriptions from the Orthodox Baptistery in Ravenna with which we started this chapter, though it is probable that golden texts decorated the walls and apses of fourth-century churches and chapels in Rome and elsewhere (see Table 2.1).[118] The earliest extant monumental metallic inscriptions include the text written onto the rear wall of the nave of Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill in Rome (c. 430), which proclaims in large capital letters the glory of the church's patron, Peter the Illyrian, as well as Pope Celestinus, who (like the letters themselves) "shone forth gloriously [*fulgeret*] as the foremost bishop in the entire world" (Figure 2.7).[119] Inside Santa Sabina, the inscription, written in the same rectangular format as the texts on the Arch of Constantine, becomes the mosaic equivalent of earlier carved and gilded texts displayed on the exteriors of buildings or monuments.

These golden texts, usually set onto a blue ground, were grand and expensive ones, commissioned by nobles, such as Anatolios, the head of the armies of the eastern empire (*magister militum per Orientem*), who in the fifth century funded the creation of a gold mosaic inscription in a church at Antioch that credited his patron, the emperor Theodosius II, with the creation of the building.[120] While we do not know where in the church Anatolios had his inscription placed, metallic texts were often placed in highly visible locations within sacred interiors. Golden dedications, many of them written in verse, became especially popular in the sixth century in Italy and surrounding regions, adorning the walls, apses, and triumphal arches of churches and chapels in Rome,[121] Ravenna,[122] Cimitile,[123] and Poreč (Parenzo).[124] Even in churches where mosaic dedicatory inscriptions were executed in darker, nonmetallic tesserae, they were often placed onto golden grounds, creating a contrast between the brilliant metallic tesserae and the more

Table 2.1 Late antique and early Umayyad buildings with metallic mosaic inscriptions*

Building	*Location*	*Date*	*Location of inscription*
Basilica of St. Paul	Philippi (Greece)	late fourth century	floor (gold)
Basilica alla Beligna	Aquileia (Italy)	early fifth century	floor (gold)
Basilica	Salona (Croatia)	fifth century	floor (gold)
Catacomb of San Gaudioso	Naples (Italy)	fifth century	apse of chapel (gold)
Santa Sabina	Rome (Italy)	422–432	rear nave wall (gold)
Santa Maria Maggiore	Rome (Italy)	c. 431	triumphal arch (gold)
San Paolo fuori le mura	Rome (Italy)	c. 440	triumphal arch (gold)
Orthodox Baptistery	Ravenna (Italy)	c. 451–473	interior walls (gold)
Hosios David	Thessaloniki (Greece)	fifth–sixth century	apse (silver)
Cappella arcivescovile	Ravenna (Italy)	late fifth–sixth century	narthex walls (gold)
Santa Eufemia	Grado (Italy)	sixth century	floor (gold)
Church of St. Felix	Cimitile (Italy)	c. 510	interior arcade (gold)
Santi Cosma e Damiano	Rome (Italy)	c. 526	apse (gold)
Basilica Eufrasiana	Poreč (Croatia)	c. 540s	apse (gold)
Church, Monastery of St. Catherine	Sinai (Egypt)	c. 548–565	apse (gold)
San Lorenzo fuori le mura	Rome (Italy)	580s	triumphal arch (gold)
Sant'Agnese fuori le mura	Rome (Italy)	c. 625	apse (gold)
Cappella di San Venanzio	Rome (Italy)	640–642	apse (gold)
Santo Stefano Rotondo	Rome (Italy)	642–649	apse (gold)
Dome of the Rock	Jerusalem	692	interior walls (gold)
Great Mosque	Damascus (Syria)	c. 705/706	*qibla* wall (gold; not extant)
Hisham's Market	Beth Shean (Israel)	c. 738	entrance gate (gold)

* Excludes symbols written in gold that do not feature as part of a longer text (e.g. the *alpha* and *omega* written in the mosaics of San Giovanni in Fonte in Naples)

Figure 2.7 Mosaic dedication, rear wall of the nave, Santa Sabina, Rome, c. 430

Source: Photograph by author

matte black glass ones.[125] Silver tesserae were sometimes used as well, most notably in the fifth-century mosaics of the church of Hosios David in Thessaloniki, where the silver inscription in the apse praises the church as a "life-giving spring" (Πηγὴ ζ(ω)τική) for the souls of the faithful and records the vow of the anonymous female donor who paid for the mosaics.[126]

While not recorded in any Jewish sacred contexts from the period, golden mosaic inscriptions were also a feature of Islamic public contexts, including the Umayyad marketplace of the city of Beth Shean, completed around 738 by the Caliph Hisham, where two metallic texts in Arabic, each on a blue ground, were placed on the piers of the market's main entrance gate, proclaiming the *bismillah* ("In the name of God, the most gracious and the most merciful") and giving credit to the caliph **(Color Plate 17)**.[127] Even more famous is the lengthy gold inscription that encircles both the interior and exterior arcades of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, whose lengthy Qurʾanic quotations, commissioned by the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik and completed in 692, proclaimed the key tenets of Islam and railed against the belief that Christ was the Son of God.[128] The glittering materiality and format of late antique and Islamic inscriptions would prove influential in the medieval period and afterwards, as in the Carolingian chapel at Germigny-des-Prés, near Orléans in France, where a golden mosaic inscription on a dark blue ground in the apse praises the glittering mosaics and the patron, Bishop Theodulf,[129] or at Salerno in Italy, where the interior of an

eighth-century chapel dedicated to Ss. Peter and Paul was ringed round with gilded copper inscriptions.[130] These golden and silver inscriptions, including mosaic texts made even more luminous by their glazed materials, possessed a special visual power in the period. Installed in prominent places, they were advertisements for the wealth of their patrons, but were also seen as having special sacred or metaphysical meanings, to which we will return shortly.

Textual materiality and immateriality

Late antique inscriptions make use of a remarkable variety of display strategies that play with their own colors and (sometimes precious) materials, testifying to the value of materiality as a tool used to enhance the brilliance and dazzle of texts as well as an aesthetic end in and of itself. However, many Christians and others felt a tension between the very present materiality of these texts and the impermanence of the earthly realm when compared to the heavenly one. Although not all of these opinions were shared by all authors or audiences, we must briefly leave behind the inscriptions themselves to investigate the range of attitudes towards the materiality of texts in the period to get a sense of the range of meanings that the material of texts had for their producers and viewers.

This tension between the power of material objects to memorialize and the decay and effacement effected by time was not a new concern in the newly Christianized empire, nor was it solely a Christian concern. Roman authors had long been fascinated with the function of inscribed text to preserve the lasting fame (*fama*) and memory (*memoria*) of a person (especially on his or her tomb), and frequently played with the idea that an inscription was guaranteed a life in perpetuity merely because it was fixed to or carved into a sturdy material support. The poet Horace concluded his first book of poetry (actually a compilation of three books, published in 23 BCE) with a poem that ranks his art (which he calls his *monumentum*, his "monument" or "memorial"), preserved through publication but also through the oral tradition of reading and memorization, as "more lasting than bronze," the material that the Romans considered to be the most durable support for inscriptions.[131] Similarly, in the first century CE, Martial bragged that his poems – again, simultaneously oral and written "monuments" – would be read even "when Messala's stones lie ruined and the high marbles of Licinus turn to dust."[132]

Late antique writers also played with the idea that inscriptions were more permanent than other texts because of their durability. While historians such as Malalas used ancient inscriptions that still survived in his time as historical sources, other authors were more attuned to the potential impermanence of inscribed texts, even those written in a seemingly durable material such as stone.[133] In the sixth century, the poet Agathias echoed Martial's earlier preference for literature over physical monuments:

> Monuments and tablets and pillars are a source of great delight to those who possess them – but only as long as they live. . . . So neither Plato nor Homer takes pride in pictures or monuments, but in wisdom alone.[134]

Almost two centuries earlier, looking at (or, more probably, imagining looking at) a centuries-old inscription, the poet Ausonius had problems deciphering the broken and effaced letters of the name of the person mentioned:

> With their forms shortened [*truncatis figuris*, a phrase that forces us to see letters as signs that are both written and drawn], all the letters are confused, and when the characters are disfigured all [meaning] is lost. Are we to wonder that man perishes? His monuments [*monumenta*] decay, and death comes even to his marbles [*saxis*] and his names [*nominibus*].[135]

Ausonius and his compatriots in Gaul, Rome, Athens, Ephesus, and other urban centers were surrounded by many weathered and decaying monuments (inscriptions, statues, buildings) from earlier periods, some of which were reused in other monuments or buildings, or, as with some Roman statues, reused without alteration as portraits of late antique honorees.[136] Bronze was seen as a more durable material than stone, and was used for the inscription of official documents such as imperial legislation, but even it could rust and decay when exposed to the elements.[137]

Even more strikingly, late antique authors often debated the appropriateness of inscriptions as monuments, a topic whose frequency comes from a fundamental change in attitudes towards the word/Word in late antiquity (discussed in Chapter 1). In this period of transition, some began to reconsider the power of certain words, especially Christian inscriptions of the divine Word (passages from the Bible and the liturgy), and others started to question the function of written human interventions in sacred spaces, including dedications meant to preserve the memories of individuals. In his *Life of Constantine*, written in the fourth century, Eusebius employs the theme of epigraphic decay to point out that "deep lettering [incised] on blocks and pillars" are earthly objects, "configurations of the corruptible body" (rather than images of the immortal soul), and are thus vulnerable to time.[138] Eusebius's disinterest in stone inscriptions finds a basis in the letters of Paul, who proclaimed his preference for the new Christian dispensation written with spirit onto "human hearts" over divine laws written onto "tablets of stone" (πλάκες λίθιναι, implying the tablets on which the Ten Commandments had been written by God).[139] By explicitly Christianizing the theme, Eusebius makes an important statement about the role of the written word (versus the divine Word) in the world: it functions only until its material is no longer able to support it. This passage contrasts with the positive treatment in the *Life* of the divinely sent inscription that appeared in the sky before Constantine's battle with Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge outside Rome, written on a cross of light: "By this [sign], conquer!" (*in hoc vinces*).[140] The miraculous text in the sky is at once striking and ephemeral, at least until it is recorded and published by Eusebius and, after the vision, apparently memorialized first in a golden and jeweled standard bearing a version of the sign (in this case, the *Chi-Rho*),[141] and later, in number of monumental inscriptions commissioned by Constantine, written in "indelible letters."[142] By distinguishing between the imperishable inscription of the Word(s) of God and

the perishable inscriptions meant to honor the earthly deeds of humans, Eusebius makes it clear that the former type of text is preferable, even if it is technically a material text.

Later authors are even more skeptical of elaborate inscriptions made of expensive substances, taking Eusebius's emphasis on the divine content of the text to extremes: as Augustine writes, "Just as if the name of God were written both in gold and in ink, the former would be the more precious, the latter the more worthless; yet that which is signified in both is one and the same."[143] However, here, Augustine, an exegete who believed that that words were "empty" signs for their referents, and that written words were inherently less meaningful than spoken ones, forces the reader to wonder to whom earthly gold is more precious, as Augustine sees the same significance in both (or, put another way, the word "God" signifies the same thing no matter how it is written).[144] His contemporary Jerome expresses distaste for books written in gold and silver ink or in uncial letters (a distinctive capital script that was used to write expensive books), professing a preference for doctrinally "correct" books over "beautiful" ones.[145] These texts bear witness to the power of the strand of early Christian thought that looked down upon the use of earthly wealth to produce elaborate decorative schemes of churches.[146]

Other authors translated this penchant for unadorned writing over texts written in precious materials into a preference for a "heavenly" inscription, in return for good deeds, over an earthly one. In his seventh-century *Life of Saint John the Almsgiver*, Leontius, bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus, tells of his subject (who was also the Patriarch of Alexandria) emphatically denying himself an inscription in the churches of Jerusalem despite his generous donations to the patriarch of Jerusalem, Modestus, after the Persian conquest of the city:

> Forgive me, true workman of Christ [here referring to Modestus], for sending nothing worthy of Christ's churches. . . . Further I beseech your venerable self not to inscribe the name of my unworthy self anywhere at all, but rather ask Christ to inscribe my name there where the inscription is truly blessed [i.e. in heaven].[147]

In the passage from his *Life*, John clarifies to Modestus that he would prefer to be remembered by Christ rather than by more earthly audiences, which implies that he is reacting to the large numbers of donor inscriptions present in churches of the period. This tension between physical and metaphysical inscription, written by God or Christ in the heavens, has its roots in earlier traditions, including Jewish belief, exemplified by the heavenly "Book of Life" in which the names of the good and the just are written and memorialized in order that they might be saved (Daniel 12:1–3).[148] Of course, though he became a saint, John lived a peaceful life as a high-ranking cleric, unlike the martyrs, who earned their names "in marks/letters of blood (*sanguinis notis*)" on earth.[149] This process is most viscerally self-narrated by the saint Eulalia during her martyrdom, in the words of the poet Prudentius, written in the early fifth century: "Look, Lord, your name is being written [*scriberis*] on me. How delightful it is to read these letters [*apices*], for

they mark [*notant*] your victories, O Christ! The purple of the blood itself that is drawn speaks your holy name!"[150] Perhaps some inscriptions writ in red paint or tesserae also conveyed a kind of violence, testifying to the dedication and devotion of donors keen to speak to the holy martyrs in their own "bloody" language.

While building inscriptions differ from the bloody marks being written onto the bodies of early Christian martyrs, all of these texts are significant because they contain some of the most descriptive Christian reactions to words written onto buildings, books, and bodies. Augustine and Jerome might prefer texts written in plain materials to fancy ones, and John wants his name inscribed in heaven rather than in a church interior, while many Christian, Jewish, and early Islamic communities clearly desired more material (and materially splendid) texts. However, though their expressed preferences are different, these texts are evidence for the depth and richness of the engagement with the materiality of texts, including by some of the same writers, such as Prudentius, who themselves composed lengthy cycles of epigrams (*tituli*) for the walls of churches.[151]

In these texts, Augustine, Jerome, and John (his "opinions" mediated through the account of his biographer Leontius) react to what must be seen as the widespread cultural practice of materializing (painting, carving, inlaying, or laying in mosaic) and elaborating written texts (inscriptions, manuscript texts) with different colors and materials. Augustine's writings also reveal a more direct engagement with the materials of church inscriptions. In his *City of God*, in the course of his consideration of followers of Plato who are reluctant to convert to Christianity, Augustine appears to engage with the sorts of golden inscriptions that began to appear in the churches of Italy during his lifetime:

> Perhaps it seems shameful to those learned men to cease to be disciples of Plato and to become disciples of Christ, who by his Spirit taught a fisherman to be wise and to say: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was nothing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of humankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it [John 1:1–5]." It was about this beginning of the holy Gospel . . . that, as we used to hear from Simplicianus, that holy old man who was afterward bishop of the church at Milan, a certain Platonist once said that it ought to be inscribed in letters of gold and set in the most prominent position in every church. But God our Master became of no account to the proud, for "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" [John 1:14]: so that it is not enough for these miserable people that they are sick, but they must also extol their own sickness and disdain to take that medicine by which they might be made well.[152]

Here, Augustine makes clear that he does not agree with that "Platonist" who wants the first few lines of John inscribed "in gold letters" in the apses (the "most prominent position") of every church, though it is precisely this kind of passage that would seem to deserve a golden inscription due to its fascination with divine

light and brilliance. Instead, though he praises the famous words of the gospel, he then criticizes those same followers of Plato (and others) for ignoring the most important facet of the message of the gospels, the Incarnation of the Word.[153]

However, as we have already seen, unlike the small number of extant inscriptions drawn from John 1, a large portion of the surviving mosaic inscriptions from the apses of churches both east and west were in fact executed in gold and silver tesserae.[154] It seems that by the fifth century, the preference of Augustine's "Platonists" had in fact become the prevailing one. Reading Augustine's words in the context of surviving inscriptions serves to highlight the new and special appreciation that Christians and others had for bright, colorful, and precious materials (the late antique "material turn"). These golden texts would have been seen by audiences as earthly reflections of texts "written" by Christ in the heavens, including those discussed by Prudentius, who mentions the names of martyrs written in heaven in "letters of gold" (*aureis litteris*).[155] Although Prudentius saw these glittering words as linked to the more violent earthly "inscriptions" of the martyrs Emeterius and Chelodonius, written in "marks of blood" (*sanguinis notis*, similar to the bloody marks written onto Eulalia's body, discussed already), others, especially elites, preferred to translate these heavenly texts literally into earthly materials. So the martyred saint Victor holds an open book with his own name written in gold in the dome mosaics of the fifth-century chapel of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro ("St. Victor in the Golden Heaven") at the church of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan, marking the saint's position in the heavenly Book of Life.[156]

The preference for colorful inscriptions, especially golden ones, is also evident in a fascinating episode in the *Life and Miracles of St. Thekla*, written around 445 CE, which narrates the (probably fantastical) attempt of the local Arian bishop to pry a golden inscription off of the walls of the main church of St. Thekla, located at Seleucia (Meriamlik) in Isauria, in modern Turkey.[157] The location of the inscription in the church remains unclear in the *Life*, which confusingly states that it was placed "on one of the walls of the martyr's church, the one which faces the second interior door of the holy enclosures – this interior door leads into the church proper, to the sacred area and the area of the virgins," suggesting perhaps one of the narthex walls of the small three-aisled basilica.[158] This inscription was "stuck" (ἐμπέπηγε) to the wall and made of "fine golden tesserae (γράμματα διὰ ψηφῖδος λεπτῆς καὶ χρυσῆς), proclaiming to all men the consubstantiality (ὁμοούσιον) of the holy and sublime Trinity."[159] Because the Arian Bishop Symposios rejected this doctrine, choosing to believe in a different relationship between God the Father and Christ the Son, he decided to have a workman remove the text:

> The one appointed for this task took up a hammer and chisel and struck and chiseled away at the inscription, persevering through the whole day. He tried in every way to dig out this inscription, but did not budge in the least the letters [or pictures] [γράμματα] of that blessed confession of faith, nor did he chip it, nor did he (as Homer says) *scratch the surface*. Clearly it was that immaculate and undefiled hand of that virgin [Thekla] which was shielding and preserving the inscription like an imperial seal [βασιλικὰ σήμαντρα],

> an inscription which is the foundation [θεμέλια] and safeguard of the whole faith, of this very church, and of human nature itself.[160]

The story does not end well for the workman: he falls off of his ladder and shatters his feet, paying the penalty for trying to remove "the divine letters" (τοῖς θείοις γράμμασι).[161] The shock of this outcome causes Symposios to realize the error of his ways and immediately renounce his Arian beliefs: "[he] proclaimed publicly and openly the very words of the inscription against which he had previously battled: the Trinity is consubstantial."[162]

This episode is quite a rich one, but most interesting for our purposes are the golden materials with which the inscription at Meriamlik is written, as well as the attitude towards the inscription expressed by the author of the *Life*. This Trinitarian text was a relatively common one in the eastern Mediterranean in the fifth and sixth centuries, written into a number of churches, chapels, and homes, as well as onto tombstones, and was clearly seen as a powerful statement of faith by many readers and viewers.[163] Although the author of the *Life* does not make it explicit, the power of this golden text comes from its content as well as its mosaic materials, whose tesserae are treated as pieces embedded into a surface (as indeed they were), their tactile nature emphasized by the workman's repeated (failed) attempts to chisel, dig, and chip them out. Under the guardianship of Thekla, the shiny letters are indestructible, allowing the inscription to serve as a "seal" for the sacredness of the building, as the "foundation" and "safeguard" of Orthodoxy and, in the end, as an agent of the conversion of the heretical bishop Symposios.

Material metaphors

As is evidenced by these texts, while not universally beloved by church authorities, golden inscriptions had significant spiritual power and tactile presence for late antique readers and viewers. But how did golden (and other) texts describe themselves? Many of the inscriptions seem to respond explicitly or implicitly to this tension between the earthly and heavenly by emphasizing their own materiality. Some of these texts, including simple dedications as well as more complex statements of faith, embrace the aesthetic pleasure of materials as a valuable end in itself, while others deny their own materiality and direct readers elsewhere in their search for religious meaning.

Metallic meanings

Texts inscribed in shiny golden glass tesserae often refer to themselves and their supports not as mosaics but as "metals" (*metalli*) or as "varied metals" (*varii metalli*).[164] These terms are poetic – after all, they describe mosaic tesserae that contained only some metal, sandwiched between layers of glass – but they highlight the metallic shine that the inscriptions emitted and ensured that the reader would have noticed and remembered their brilliance, which (as we have seen) evoked Roman associations with wealth, status, and divinity. Consistent with Liz James's analysis of the

late antique focus on brightness over specific color hues, the inscriptions rarely mention color in terms of hue, instead focusing on their own brilliance.[165] Characteristic of the language of the golden inscriptions displayed on blue backgrounds, the apse inscription in Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome (526–530) praises the "brilliant" (*speciosa*) church interior that "beams with bright metals" (*claris radiat . . . metallis*) **(Color Plate 18)**.[166] A number of other golden mosaic texts feature very similar self-referential (and classical) language, using verbs like "flash" (*coruscare*),[167] "flash/glitter" (*fulgere*),[168] "twinkle or sparkle" (*micare*),[169] "shine" (*nitere*, *splendere*, or in Greek, λάμπω),[170] as well as "gleam red" (*rutilare*).[171] While many of these verbs are synonyms, certain terms emphasize different aspects of reflected and refracted light, including "sparkle" (*micare*), which drew attention to the glittering light that would have seemed to vibrate off the tesserae as the reader moved around the interior, an effect emphasized by the careful placement of windows, lamps, and candles.[172] For late antique viewers (as for the Romans before them), the brightness evoked by terms such as *fulgere* ("to flash," "to glitter") was not just a lighting effect; it was also a color.[173] The self-referential language of brightness was so popular that it continued to be used into the seventh century and beyond in Rome, including in a cluster of apse mosaics built by Pope Paschal I in Rome in the ninth century, such as the church of Santa Prassede.[174]

As Arwed Arnulf has pointed out,[175] the language of these gold inscriptions is quite similar to that of late antique ekphrasis, especially those of the sixth-century authors Procopius and Paul the Silentiary, who praise the brilliant interior of the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the latter of whom delivered his ekphrasis in the nearby residence of the Patriarch.[176] While hyperbolic, the inscriptions – like the ekphraseis – remind the viewer that light is an *active* force within the gilded interiors of churches, as in Sant'Agnese fuori le mura in Rome, redecorated by Pope Honorius c. 625–638, whose gold apse inscription begins by describing the "golden picture" (*aurea . . . pictura*) which rises up from the "pieces of metal (tesserae)" (*concisis . . . metallis*), creating the impression that the daylight "having been embraced is, at the same, time confined" **(Color Plate 19)**.[177] Even more vivid is the slightly earlier golden mosaic inscription from the tiny vaulted entrance hall of the *cappella arcivescovile* in Ravenna, whose verse text presents an active image of the chapel as the "birthplace" of light and plays on the shining "stones" (*saxa*) (either the marbles of the walls or the mosaics of the vault) and the "stony" name of the patron, Peter (from *petra*, rock).[178] Not only do these texts speak in a classical medium – derived from the monumental gilded bronze inscriptions that we examined previously – but also in classical terms, reusing and remixing Roman ekphrastic passages from the works of Ovid and other Roman poets that describe the brilliant interiors of palaces and public buildings.[179] By using the venerable language of ekphrasis, the composers of these inscriptions (sometimes the patrons themselves, sometimes commissioned poets) advertised their acculturation and erudition (*paideia*). However, these golden texts do not just speak in the language of classical antiquity, but also embody a crucial linkage between medium and message: they remind Christian viewers that Christ (who is depicted in most of the mosaics above such golden inscriptions) is

the Word of God incarnate, and accordingly they speak His (Christ's, or God's) Word(s).[180] Late antique viewers most likely read these texts as "living" ones that embedded Christ's presence even more deeply into their sacred buildings.[181] Although the inscriptions do not replicate the opening words of the Gospel of John, as Augustine might have preferred, they shine forth powerfully from and against their dark backgrounds.

These metallic inscriptions not only revel in their bright materials, they also turn materiality into argument. Some inscriptions praise the shining bodies of martyrs and other holy personages that "gleam forth with light, resting under the decorated altar" (as in the fourth- or fifth-century Church of Alexander at Tipasa in Algeria), turning the often less than visually stunning relics of saints into what Patricia Cox Miller has termed "dazzling bodies."[182] As Erik Thunø has pointed out, many of these texts adorn churches dedicated to martyrs, especially in Rome, proclaiming the virtues of the saints in the words of Christ Himself.[183] Others use their brilliance to praise their patrons, as does one inscription we have already discussed, the golden mosaic inscription from Santa Sabina in Rome.[184] This text implicitly links its own brilliance to that of the presiding bishop of Rome (and one of the patrons of the church): "When Celestinus held the apostolic throne, and shone forth gloriously [*fulgeret*] as the foremost bishop in the entire world."[185] In the context of the former text, the bishop's very name, literally "from (or of) the heavens," emphasizes the shine of both mosaic and patron. Other golden texts tend to be even more pointed in their descriptions of the brilliance of the patron and his or her building. At Poreč, the Bishop Eufrasius demolished the earlier structure, described as "small, filthy, and at that time devoid of great metallic decoration" (*exiguum . . . que carens tunc . . . metallo . . . putria*), and on the verge of collapse, erecting a new church from the ground up with a golden apse mosaic, "what you now see, gleaming with varied metallic decoration" (*quas cernis nuper vario fulgere metallo*).[186] Through the words and the materials of the text, each of which possesses a figurative or literal gleam, Eufrasius becomes the renewer (*renovator*) of the church, bringing brightness into a formerly dark and dingy space.[187]

These bright texts are reflexive, documenting and confirming viewers' experiences of their shiny words and materials, and they use their embodied materiality to praise their patrons or holy figures in the church. However, an even more interesting group of inscriptions praises their own metal materials in order to then *deny* their value. We have already looked at the text inscribed in the apse of Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome, which exults in the glitter of the metallic (and other) wall mosaics. However, after praising the gleam of the interior, the inscription goes on to privilege the gleam of faith over any material shine:

> *Aula D(e)i claris radiat speciosa metallis*,
> *in qua plus fidei lux pretiosa micat*.
>
> The brilliant hall of God shines with bright metals,
> in which the precious light of faith gleams more.[188]

This text was not the first inscription to contrast earthly and heavenly materials and materiality directly, and in fact appears to have been modeled after an earlier Roman inscription from the Rotunda chapel of Sant'Andrea at Old St. Peter's, built by Pope Symmachus around the turn of the fifth century CE, which describes the "sparkling" interior as "more brightly adorned with faith than with the gleam of metals" (*Templa micant plus compta fide quam luce metalli*).[189] These texts speak to the same material/spiritual concerns that we have seen articulated by a number of Christian authors in the period, concerns that would later be addressed by the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who, writing in Syria in the late fifth or sixth century, argued that divine light (though perceivable only as mental image) should be thought of as much more brilliant and powerful than the light within church interiors.[190] According to the theological system articulated by Pseudo-Dionysius, heavily influenced by Platonic and Neo-Platonic modes of thought, God *is* light, as well as the source of all material light. Because humans are incapable of perceiving heavenly light, viewers may use the earthly light within the church as a conceptual aid for visualizing or imagining heavenly light, as "material lights are outpourings of an immaterial [divine] gift of light."[191] Viewers were thus encouraged to read the shimmering golden interior of the church symbolically as an earthly reflection of the heavenly realm, a space that encouraged contemplation of divine epiphanies, such as the miraculous appearance of Christ depicted in the apse of the church itself.[192]

However, the Cosma e Damiano inscription does not simply declare that the brilliance of the building derives from the brilliance of God. Instead, the text reminds the viewer that the "light of faith" supercedes even the "brilliant" (*claris*) material light within the church, simultaneously noting, glorying in, *and* denigrating its earthly materials. Strikingly, the inscription responds to the concerns about the value of material texts discussed previously, debates that resounded in texts written into floors as well, as in the fourth-century floor mosaic of the villa of Eustolios at Kourion, whose dedicatory inscription proclaims that the house is protected by the "much-venerated signs of Christ" (πολύλλιτα σήματα Χριστοῦ), possibly the geometric cross-shaped designs in the pavement, instead of by its materials of big stones (λίθων μεγάλων), solid iron (στερεοῖο σιδήρου), bronze (χαλκοῦ), or adamant (ἀδάμαντος).[193] Even more importantly, the Cosma e Damiano text responds to the worry that shiny materials might distract viewers from prayer and contemplation. This concern was an ancient one, clearly articulated by Eusebius of Caesarea in his description of the new church at Tyre, in modern-day Lebanon, whose interior of "brilliant beauty" (φαιδρὰ ταῦτα κάλλη) and "shiny appearance" (ἀποστίλβουσαν ὄψιν), distracts the viewer from listening to the sermon: as Eusebius puts it, "the witness of the eye leaves no place for the instruction that comes through the ears."[194] Even after the "material turn" of the early Christian period, brilliance and dazzle were perceived as powerful and potentially dangerous visual effects, and so our inscription suppresses its golden substance in order to avert some of the danger posed by its own shine.[195]

Texts in (and of) pieces

While these delightfully brilliant inscriptions written in gold and silver play with their own shiny substances, other texts, including texts written into and onto the floors of churches, use their stony (rather than shiny) substances to articulate a different range of ideas about sacred buildings, their patrons, and faith, embracing a textual play popular since the Hellenistic period.[196] Of the stone inscriptions that do speak to the materials of their composition, the majority use terms (most held over from the classical period) that are linked to specific materials or spatial contexts. Latin floor mosaic inscriptions rarely mention their own medium, only occasionally proclaiming that donors "tessellated" (*tesselavit*) a floor, reminding readers of the fragmentary nature of the medium.[197] Greek inscriptions within floor mosaics speak more frequently about their materiality, often referring to themselves as "works of tesserae" (ψήφωσις, literally a work of made up of "pebbles," ψῆφοι), sometimes using the passive form of a verb in a past tense: so, the building "was decorated with mosaic" (ἐψηφώθη).[198] This term emphasizes the fundamental nature of the medium, one made up of little pieces, as well as the stony character of the pieces. Other terms are even more material in their resonances. In several mosaic inscriptions from Greece and Turkey, including the inscription from Philippi that we examined earlier, Greek inscriptions describe their material support as a "pricking" (κέντησις, from the verb κεντέω; also "sting" or "stab"), evoking the small tesserae of the mosaic but also perhaps suggesting the motion of the mosaicist as (s)he makes the work (placing tesserae into its bedding as "pricking" the surface of the floor).[199]

While these terms have been cataloged, their deeper significances have not yet been unpacked fully. In slightly different ways, these inscriptions refer to themselves to draw attention to the material properties of the texts and their supports, especially the fragmentary character of the medium of mosaic.[200] But while they do not often speak of specific colors, in addition to making clear to the reader that they are texts in pieces, a number of inscriptions from the period employ their own mosaic-ness as allegory for an even greater fragmentation, that of ποικιλία (*poikilia*, or in Latin, *vario*), a term with an extended range of meanings related to adornment or ornamentation, including "variety" (or "diversity") and "changeability," typically of colors, materials, and visual effects,[201] a concept found in Latin under the word "variety" (*varietas*).[202] *Poikilia* was not limited to art and architecture alone: Aristotle had valued variation as a desirable stylistic feature of certain types of literature,[203] while later literary critics such as Demetrios connected variety as embellishment to delight or charm (*charis*).[204] By the fourth century CE, the word had a very rich and ancient set of associations: it was a word used by Homer, Hesiod, and others to describe Prometheus and Odysseus as cunning (from their intricate or changeable thought patterns),[205] as well as by Roman writers to describe objects as either variegated in color or form.[206] The association between variety and delight still resonated in late antique poetry, especially in the rich poetry of Nonnus, the poet who (as we have already seen) was also fond of describing his characters reading and interacting

with colorful inscriptions.[207] This umbrella concept of *poikilia* was not only about color, but also about juxtaposition, the effects that colors, characters, plot elements, and so on had when read or viewed against each other, creating a complicated pattern that evokes a multiplicity of interpretations. For readers and viewers, *poikilia* testified to the skill of the craftsman and the agency of the work to please and to charm.[208]

Looking at the play with color and material evident in the floor mosaic inscriptions that we examined earlier in this chapter, it is clear from their appearances alone that their creators, both artists and patrons, also made a link between variety and visual pleasure, consistent with the "jeweled style" so beloved in the period.[209] When read, the Christian inscriptions themselves speak of that same pleasure and enjoyment by invoking *poikilia*. The focus on the varied materials of mosaics was not new in in the late antique period, as Roman authors such as Horace and Diodorus Siculus had also described mosaics as made up of "varied stones" (*lapides varios*)[210] or "stones of different kinds" (ἑτερογενῶν λίθων),[211] but late antique inscriptions push this theme of variety even further, using it for different ends. The primary dedicatory inscription in the late fourth-century Church of St. Spyridon at Trimithous (Tremethousa) on Cyprus, proclaims from its place in the central nave pavement that Kartairios, at the instruction of the saint, adorned the church "with multicolored painted tesserae" (ψηφί[δι γρα]πτῇ ποικιλήται).[212] This text, written in white tesserae onto a dark ground, encourages the viewer to enjoy the mosaics, as well as the mosaic inscription itself, as a multicolored work whose embedded contrasts (between dark and light, between rigid geometric patterns and soft vegetal forms, and between inscription and images) allow the varied and variable colors *and* forms of the pavement to enchant and dazzle the viewer. By playing on the multiple meanings of the term *graphē*, which could signify painting, drawing, *or* writing, the inscription makes the viewer confront its own materiality, both the colorful and varied stones of the pavement as well as the visual effect that those stones could have, as the inscription could seem at once to be a written text and a (painted) image.[213]

Other floor inscriptions articulate the love of variation in even more elaborate (and varied) material terms. The dedicatory inscription of the fourth- or fifth-century Thyrsos Basilica at Tegea in Greece, written in black letters onto a white-ground *tabula ansata* held up by two *putti*, praises the noble deeds of the patron, Bishop Thyrsos, to which the church and the "well-assembled decoration of delicate stones bear witness . . ." (μαρτυρῖ . . . καὶ λίθου λεπταλέης εὐσύνθετος κό̣[σ]μ[ος . . .]) (Figure 2.8).[214] We will return to the extraordinary effect of this frame in the next chapter, which creates the spatial illusion that the inscription tablet and its bearers are floating in front of the geometric ground of the rest of the mosaic. But just reading the text of the inscription and viewing its surroundings highlights the testimonial power of the floor as it speaks to the wealth and taste of the bishop. Pointing back at its creators, the text emphasizes the relative delicacy and small size of the tesserae (which speak to the cost of the work in the language of the late Hellenistic poet Callimachus, who at one point described his own style as that of *leptotes*, meaning "fineness" or "subtlety") as well as the skill of the mosaicists, who were able to put the pieces of the mosaic together well, creating an orderly composition.[215] Similarly,

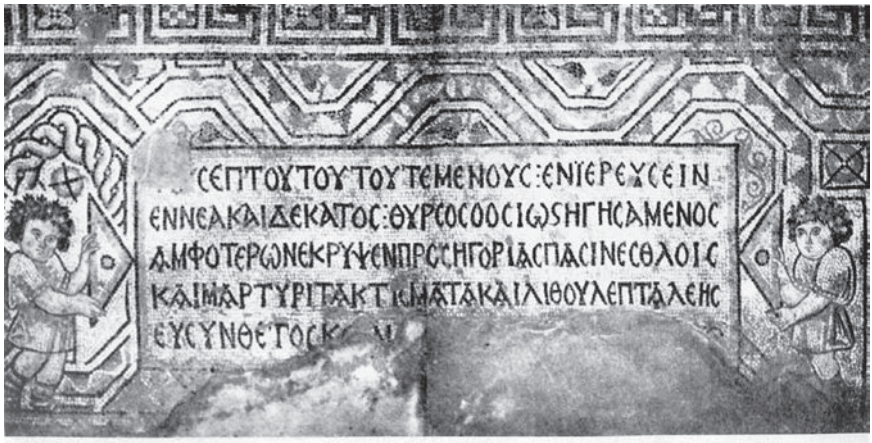

Figure 2.8 Mosaic dedication, pavement of entrance, Thyrsos Basilica, Tegea, Greece, late fourth or early fifth century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Panayiota Atzaka

the inscription from the pavement of the sixth-century Church of Ss. Peter and Paul at Gerasa, discussed in Chapter 1, describes the interior of the church as decorated "with decorations of silver and vividly-colored stones" (ἀργυρέοις κόσμοισι καὶ εὐβαφέεσσι λίθοισιν), the stones of the floor described as deeply colored (εὐβαφέσι), a term which could also mean "deeply dyed," evoking the medium of textile.[216] Under the proper lighting conditions, the text itself, written in white onto the deep red ground of a *tabula ansata*, would have gleamed forth with a white light that could have been seen by some as "silvery" (ἀργυρέοις).

Crucially, the ways in which the mosaics describe themselves, and are described in contemporary literature, encouraged readers to see the works of art as slipping back and forth between media, as stone tesserae or marble slabs evoked paintings, texts, or woven cloth, as well as between artificial and natural worlds, as church floors turned into bright meadows of flowers[217] or watery expanses.[218] These loves of variety, multi-mediality, and the imagery of the natural world were particularly late antique in character, and gave way in the later Byzantine period to a preference for purity and unvariegation.[219] By drawing attention to the varied colors, forms, and materials of the stone mosaics around them, late antique inscriptions perform self-referential ekphraseis based literally and figuratively in their materials. Although more matte than glass, these stones, used to make up inscriptions and the wider decorative schemes in which they were framed, could shine through their colors, scripts, and decorative elements, "flashing [ἀπαστράπτοντα] from God's grace here and there" inside the church.[220]

The texts of the inscriptions from Tegea and Gerasa, among others, say even more about their own colorful substances. They also use a Greek word, *kosmos*, that requires further examination. In discussions of these two inscriptions, the

term is usually translated as "decoration" or "ornament." However, the word has a much broader – and deeper – set of meanings in the period, including "order" as well as "world" and "heaven," hence "cosmos" in the sense of the "universe," all of which had been inherited from classical antiquity.[221] Strikingly, the *kosmos* of the mosaic compositions described by these two inscriptions involves not only colorful adornments (of which the text is one) but also cosmological images: though fragmentary, the nave pavement of the Church of Ss. Peter and Paul was decorated with representations of the Egyptian cities Alexandria and Memphis (see Figure 1.1), while that of the Tegea church featured personifications of the months and the four rivers of Paradise, all surrounded by sea creatures.[222] These churches show nature Christianized and controlled, placed within the proper, orderly hierarchy of things, with the terrestrial world below (on the floor) and the glittering heavenly world above (the glass mosaics of the walls, or the gilding of the ceiling).[223] The Gerasa and Tegea inscriptions, then, are the tip of a much larger iceberg, but reveal an explicit *Christian* play with the material and metaphysical valences of *kosmos*, as well as with the material and textual content of the inscription, converting mere decoration into a meaningful religious statement about the "order" that the patron has established through mosaic.

Other stony texts inscribed in the floors of churches both east and west perform similarly complex interpretative work, using their materials to construct a variety of arguments. In the sixth-century church of Santa Eufemia in Grado, located on a small peninsula off the coast of Aquileia in Italy, the primary dedicatory inscription glories in the new "varied forms" (*vario formata*) of the floor mosaic, which replaced the "marble pictures" (*picto . . . marmore*, possibly *opus sectile*) of the earlier church.[224] For the reader, these new forms surely included both the geometric decorations of the pavement as well as the fifty-six donor inscriptions that adorned the pavement, turning the interior into a truly epigraphic monument. Farther to the east, inscribed texts in the East Cathedral at Apamea, in Syria, completed around 528/529, delight even more strongly in the varied materials and forms in which they were created, a delight that we have already seen (visually) in the mosaic inscriptions of the synagogue in the same city.[225] Inside the cathedral, a centrally planned structure with four lobes (a tetraconch), two roundel-framed inscriptions in different mediums – mosaic and *opus sectile* – were placed in the floor of the outer ambulatory, the carved stone (*opus sectile*) text set behind the altar and the mosaic laid in the southeast room (Figures 2.9 and 2.10).[226] The former inscription, carved into the more expensive marble pavement of the ambulatory behind the altar, reads:

> Πολλῶν μετ' ἄλ-
> λων κ(αὶ) τόπον τὸν
> ἐνθάδ' ἐκόσμησε
> Παῦλος τῇι πολυ-
> μόρφωι συνθέσει.
>
> Among *many* [other places], Paul decorated this place here with a *many-formed* composition.[227]

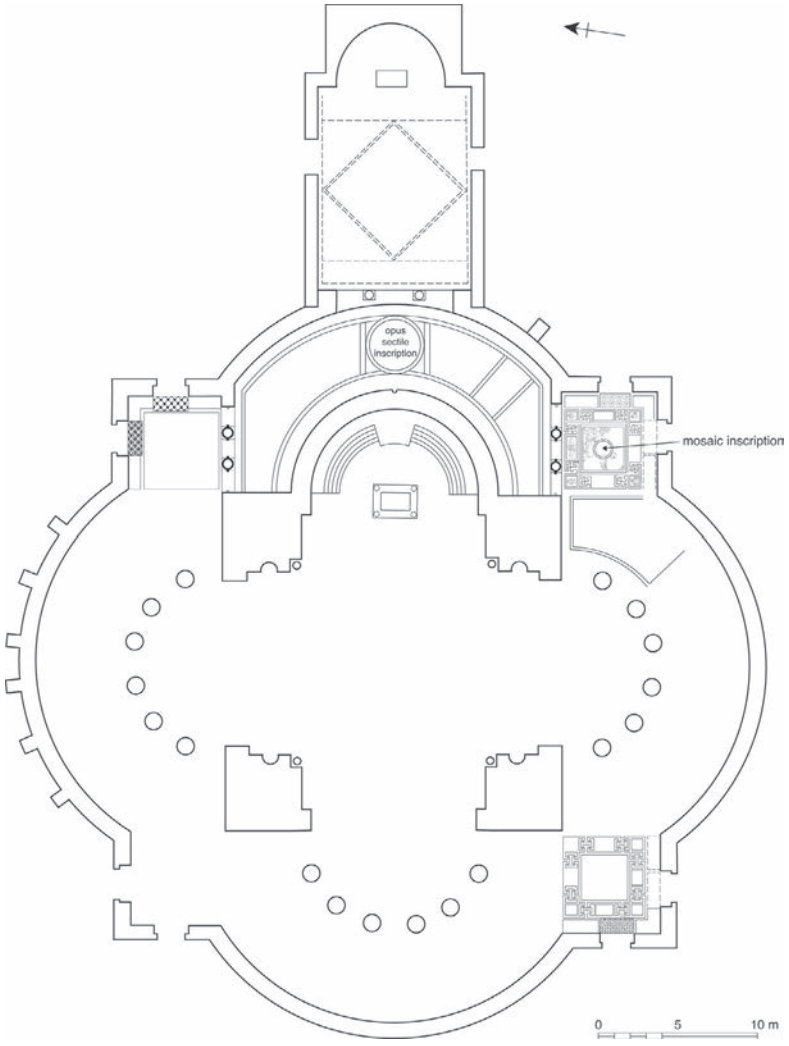

Figure 2.9 Plan, East Cathedral, Apamea, 533

Source: Plan by Alison Wilkins, after Donceel-Voûte 1988, 213 fig. 192

Playing with the classical *topos* of innumerability still in use in the period – that of monuments "too many to be mentioned"[228] – as well as with *kosmos* and with multiple deictics ("this place *here*," τόπον τὸν ἐνθάδε), the inscription emphasizes the generosity of the patron, Bishop Paul, whose "many-formed" or "manifold" composition of pieces of cut marble all evoke multiples and multiplicity, including the *opus sectile* pavement, whose many shapes and types of marble, originally from different quarries, quite literally have to be "put together" or "synthesized" (συνθέσει).[229] The latter text,

Figure 2.10 Mosaic dedication, pavement of the East Cathedral, Apamea
Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

which mentions additional donations made by the same man, is even more unusual in its content, which can be read in multiple different ways:

> Τὴν ποικί-
> λην ψηφῖδα
> Παῦλος εἰσάγει
> ὁ ποικιλόφρων
> τῶν ἄνωθεν
> δογμάτων.
>
> Paul offers the *multi-colored mosaic*, he whose mind abounds with *higher dogmas*.[230]

While each text glories in its own materials – colorful mosaic, geometric marbles – the two texts fit together seamlessly, creating a true *synthesis* in which texts, materials, and argument are all seamlessly integrated. Educated readers of sixth-century Apamea, perhaps including Paul's clerical colleagues, would have appreciated this rich wordplay involving multiples of places, forms, and materials (in the carved inscription), and of colors and religious and/or philosophical beliefs (in the mosaic). Some of these would have recognized the references to the famous hero Odysseus that are embedded in both inscriptions, including to the very first line of the *Odyssey* in which Homer describes Odysseus as a man "of many devices" (ἄνδρα . . .

πολύτροπον, which becomes the πολυμόρφωι of the carved inscription),[231] as well as to a distinctive and rare epithet used by the playwright Euripides for the hero (ποικιλόφρων, literally "full of varied wiles").[232] In a genius twist, these "devices" (the plots and tricks for which the hero was infamous) undergo a twofold transformation, first "morph"-ing into the colorful mosaics and stone that make up the floor of the church, obliquely linking Paul to Odysseus while changing one medium (that of cleverness) into a more material one, then suddenly becoming ephemeral again in the form of Paul's beliefs.[233] The *kosmos* of the Apamea cathedral, then, is not only a Christian order, but is also a classical one in which a learned clergyman employs materials that quite literally materialize himself and his erudition. By playing with the rich concepts of variety (*poikilia*) and decoration (*kosmos*), artists and patrons created integrated programs of texts and images that promoted both Christian ideas about the proper order of the universe as well as notions that had more classical connections, allowing patrons to simultaneously portray themselves as learned individuals and devout Christians. These texts make their points in the language of their own materials, literally grounding their descriptions in their own substances while, at the same time, encouraging readers to view mosaics or cut marble floors as works of art that could slip and slide between mediums (painting, textiles), and between the natural world and the realm of artifice.

Colored texts, colored forms

In addition to brightness, *poikilia*, and *kosmos*, late antique viewers also noticed the colors of these texts. More precisely, they noticed the colors of texts within the larger matrix of colorful materials – stone, wood, metal, and glass – that adorned sacred interiors. We have already examined the visual and potential symbolic impacts of these colors and materials on viewers. Beyond black, red, and gold, surviving accounts of inscription reading do not include mentions of the specific colors of texts. However, the persistent and often inventive experimentation with colorful texts that we have noted throughout this chapter indicates that artists, patrons, and at least some *other* viewers perceived the visual powers and metaphorical meanings of colorful texts, materializing and literalizing the so-called "jeweled style" and linking *kosmos* as decoration to the divine (Christian) *kosmos*, which was made material in the form of the church interior. In this context, variety (*poikilia*) – of colors, forms, and materials – was one of the most highly valued features of sacred interiors.

Our colorful inscriptions literalize yet another popular trope of the period, that of "painting in colors." Early Christian exegetes considered color to be a precondition for visible form, especially the forms of figures both human and divine: as John Chrysostom put it, "as long as someone traces the outline as in a drawing, there is a kind of shadow (σκιά). But when he paints over it brilliant blooms (ἄνθος) and lays on colors (χρώματα), then an image (εἰκών) emerges."[234] This connection between color and form was an ancient one, but early Christians went a step further and interpreted this artistic relationship between the sketch and the colored image as parallel to the relationship between the "shadow" or "type" of

the Old Testament (the Law received from God by Moses) and the technicolor reality of the New Testament (the deeds of Christ's life).[235]

"True" Christian colors could be applied to visual *or* verbal icons in order to flesh out images of holy individuals. Regardless of their mediums, though, these "true" colors were *bright* ones, a fact that the Syrian poet Jacob of Sarug bemoaned when he tried to "paint" an image of St. Ephrem:

> How shall I, an ugly man, depict you? The colors of my discourse are too common for your narrative. . . . My paints are dirty because of my foulness, and your image requires colors that are all ablaze. . . . My colors are dirty and resemble a dark cloud; your icon requires the brightness of fire for the sake of its beauty.[236]

However, when painted "correctly," colorful words and images could seem to be clear and distinct likenesses of their prototypes, and thus to be *lifelike*, as indicates a late sixth-century painted *titulus* (unfortunately, not extant) from Tours Cathedral in France, composed by Venantius Fortunatus: "The display of pictures [of St. Martin] that decorates the building leads one to think that the colored forms are living figures."[237] These figures at Tours seem to be (but are not actually) "alive" because they are not just sketches or outlines, but are finished, colored images, figures made real enough to assert their presences in the church. Indeed, holy figures needed to be painted or depicted correctly in all their particulars, including their colors, if viewers were to recognize their identities and to direct prayers to the prototypes of the images.[238]

While they were only part of larger decorative schemes in sacred interiors, our colorful inscriptions materialized this trope of "colored forms." By "painting" texts in colors, late antique artists turned spoken words into material texts that could be read as well as viewed. These texts, especially red, white, and golden ones, were living words in a visual sense, jumping off their walls or floors and in front of the eyes (and ears) of viewers. Some, such as the golden inscriptions in the churches of Rome that we discussed previously, were alive in a more particularly Christian sense, as they played with ideas of incarnation and embodiment that were central to Christian belief.

Certain other inscriptions teased out these notions of "living color," demonstrating the ways in which artists, especially mosaicists, and patrons thought about this verbal figuration as it related to images as well as texts. In the sixth-century Basilica of St. Anastasia at Arkasas in Greece, the dedicatory inscription in the central pavement of the narthex records the first-person dedication of the patron, Kyros, to the saint:

> + Ἀναστασίαν νύμφην καὶ συνζυ-
> γὸν τοῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ ἥνπερ ἐξεγόρασεν διὰ
> τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τῆς ζω-
> ῆς δοξῆς περιβεβλημμένην καὶ πε-
> πυκιλμένην δοξάζοντες ἐγὼ

ὁ ἁμαρτολὸς καὶ ἐλεεινὸς
Κῦρος ἐπίσκοπος οἵ τε εὐλαβεῖς
κ(αὶ) θεοφιλεῖς κληρικοὶ τὸν τόπον
ἐκοσμήσαμεν ἐν μ(ηνὶ) Ἰουνίω κ(αὶ) ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) Γ. +

Because we glorify Anastasia, the bride and spouse of Christ, whom He the leader of glorious life redeemed with his own blood, (Anastasia) who was clothed and worked in many colors, we the sinner and merciful Bishop Kyros and the pious and God-loving clerics adorned this place in the month of June and in the third indiction.[239]

While the text itself is written in plain black tesserae onto a white ground, its content is colorful indeed. The inscription tells us that Anastasia had been "clad and worked in colors" (περιβεβλημμένην καὶ πεπυκιλμένην, the latter word related to *poikilia*), quoting Psalm 45 (46):13 in order to refer to a colorful image of the saint in her church, perhaps a painting or mosaic on the walls, or, if not a physical image, a mental one. In its original Old Testament context, the passage from Psalm 45 (46), so fitting in the context of the late antique link between color and form, describes the daughter of the King of Tyre as "clothed in robes woven with gold and worked in many colors" (ἐν κροσσωτοῖς χρυσοῖς περιβεβλημένη πεποικιλμένη), a sumptuously materialistic description that was popularly interpreted by Christians as a reference to the princess's spiritual beauty rather than to her clothes and jewelry.[240] However, in the context of St. Anastasia specifically, the quotation would seem to refer to the saint's spiritual and physical raiments. The later *passio* of the saint, set during the persecution of Diocletian, is rich with mentions of clothing and jewelry: Anastasia, the daughter of the Roman noble Praetextatus, was wealthy but rejected her material riches by wearing shabby clothing to visit Christian prisoners; the saint's "sisters in Christ," Agape and Chyonia, were consigned to the fire, but their bodies and clothes remained unscathed, a sign of their true faith; and Anastasia herself refused to be bought by offers of fine jewelry from the Roman authorities, resisting in order to stay true to her faith.[241]

No image of the saint survives in the church at Arkasas. However, at least one mosaic image of her survives from the period, in the sixth-century church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, where she is one of the female saints depicted processing along the walls of the nave, clad (like the others) in bejeweled and embroidered garments of gold, her name inscribed above her head in black tesserae.[242] The Arkasas inscription, with its rich intertextual play between the psalm and the *Life* of the saint, also reminds the reader that the church building itself was clad in colorful mosaics, an architectural equivalent to the rich garments that Anastasia would have been wearing in her image, despite having rejected them during her life.

Here, we return to the tension between the material and the spiritual that has been omnipresent throughout the chapter, reinforced in the inscribed text at Arkasas by the presence of that powerful word *kosmos* (ἐκοσμήσαμεν, "we [the

donors] adorned . . ."), with its multivalent significances of earthly beauty and heavenly order. While colorful texts and images were beloved by late antique artists, patrons, and viewers alike, those colors were yoked to a deeper model of religious meaning. Colors could enable art to "ferry over the prayer of the heart" to the mind,[243] making sacred images effective for their viewers: so, at Arkasas, colors completed the form of the saint's image in paint or mosaic, activating it as a true *eikon* of Anastasia. But even this beautiful image had to be linked to the act of prayer to fulfill its purpose within its Christian cultic context: as Gregory of Nyssa put it, "Every word [or image] set apart from deeds, even if it is beautifully decked out, is a lifeless icon which portrays a form blooming with paint and color."[244]

For the love of materials

Despite the concern articulated by Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and others about the emptiness of beautiful, "jeweled" texts, late antique patrons, artists, and viewers overwhelmingly preferred bright interiors adorned with colorful texts in Christian as well as Jewish and early Islamic contexts. While very few longer (uninscribed) texts describe these bright inscriptions, the colors and materials of the inscriptions themselves speak to the popularity of texts that often self-consciously embraced their own materiality, emphasizing their own visual effects and turning the stone, glass, or paint of which they were made into metaphors for viewing and sites of interaction with the divine. Artfully composed as texts and as images, the inscriptions of late antique churches, synagogues, and mosques adapted the visual and textual strategies of earlier Roman inscriptions, in some cases directly quoting from Greek and Roman works of literature, harnessing the power of bright materials and, in Christian contexts, yoking it to a new, complicated model of sacred vision and visuality.

Notes

1 On the brilliant interiors of late antique churches, Miller 2009; Pentcheva 2011; Schibille 2014; Pentcheva 2017. On brilliantly painted interiors, of which a number survive in Egypt, Bolman 2006, 2010, 2016.
2 Deichmann 1969, 130–51, and 1974, 17–47; Kostof 1965; Wharton 1987; Ristow 1998, 189, no. 389; Pasquini 2005; Deliyannis 2010, 88–100; Jensen 2011a, 198–204; Dresken-Weiland 2016, 63–102; Carile 2016a.
3 On the conservation and restoration history of the mosaics, Muscolino 2011.
4 On the painted stuccoes, Deliyannis 2010, 95–6, with prior bibliography.
5 Jensen 2011a, 243.
6 On the arrangement of lights in the baptistery, Ivanovici 2014, and 2016, 19–124. On the effects of light on the experience of viewing mosaics more generally, Schöne 1954, 47–8, 52–4; Franses 2003, 13–23; Nelson 2006; Nesbitt 2012. On windows in early churches, Wand 1968; Dell'Aqua 2006.
7 Wharton 1987. On the senses of touch and hearing in late antiquity and Byzantium, hot topics of late, James 2004; Hunter-Crawley 2013; Pentcheva 2014; Caseau 2016; Betancourt 2016b; Pentcheva 2017; Ashbrook Harvey and Mullett 2017; Betancourt 2018; Pentcheva 2018; Purves 2018.
8 On polychromy and late antique Jewish art, Fine 2013.

9 Roberts 1989, 2011–2012; also Lobato 2012. The literary "jeweled style" has been much discussed of late, including its most representative work, the *cento* ("patchwork") poem made up of a mix of lines drawn from the work of other poets: see especially McGill 2005; Bažil 2009; Sandnes 2011.
10 Recent works on Roman polychromy include Brinkmann and Wünsche 2004, 2007; Brinkmann, Primavesi, and Hollein 2008.
11 James 1996. On the ancient use of singular color terms for a range or cloud of concepts, Clarke 2004, 122–5.
12 James 1996, 125–7, 2000, 2003a. For a critique of James's focus on brilliance, Bradley 2009, 22–3. On ancient color perceptions generally, Gage 1993; Elsner 2007a, 218–24; Sassi 2015.
13 On mosaic materials, the study of glass over the past two decades has provided important insights: Janes 1998, 111–12; James 2000, 41–4; Fiori 2001, 303–5; James 2006, 2017, 21–45. More recent work has concentrated on scientific and mathematical approaches to studying the ways in which mosaics reflect light around buildings: Iliadis 2001; Schibille 2009.
14 On the connection between the material and spiritual in such spaces, Schibille 2014; also useful is Pentcheva 2014.
15 Betancourt 2016a.
16 Barry 2007.
17 Kiilerich 2012, 2016.
18 Flood 2016.
19 Pentcheva 2017, 121–49.
20 E.g. Miller 2000, 2009. The novelty of a specific "Christian" materiality has been overdramatized by some scholars, as the emphasis on the materiality of the sacred was not a completely new development but rather an intensification of an existing value system: see, for example, Bynum 2011.
21 For a selection of recent work on these topics, see Chapter 1.
22 + *Ubi deposuit IHS vestimenta sua et misit aquam in pelvem et labit pedes discipulorum suorum*: Deliyannis 2010, 95, helpfully lists this and the other three texts; on their interpretation, Kostof 1965, 59–61; Deichmann 1974, 28–30. The inscriptions may have once been paired with mosaics depicting scenes from the New Testament, located in the apsidioles beneath the extant texts: see Dresken-Weiland 2016, 63–71, who attempts to reconstruct their appearance and meaning. On other inscriptions in baptisteries, many of which relate to the ritual functions of the buildings, Jensen 2011b.
23 See the discussion in Chapter 1.
24 Comprehensive studies of the composition of floor mosaic tesserae have not yet been undertaken, but on the Petra Church, Paradise 2001, where they are made primarily of local limestone and imported marble; and on the Monastery of Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim in Palestine (also tesserae of local stone), Magen and Talgam 1990, especially 149. This local focus accords with mosaic practice in the western provinces, including Britain: Allen 2004. On glass tesserae used in wall mosaics, Schibille and McKenzie 2013; James 2017, 21–45. Texts carved onto wood include the dedicatory inscription from a sixth-century church of St. Thomas, reused in the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem: Lev-Yadun 1992.
25 No detailed study has been undertaken of the production of carved inscriptions in late antiquity, but the Roman V-cut and U-cut were still in use in the period, along with simpler methods: on the cuts of Roman inscriptions, Susini 1973, 23–9; Petrucci 1993, 2; late antique inscriptions with the "v"-trench (also called the "triangular trench") include, from Aphrodisias, Roueché 2004, nos. 50–51, 100. On the painting of carved texts in the Greek world, Butz 2009, 36, 2010, 27.
26 The text of the inscription is *AG* 1.10, ed. and trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 10–17; see Harrison 1986, no. 1, 117–9, fig. A. Unfortunately, Harrison does not appear to have measured the letters' depth of relief. On the traces of paint, which suggest that

the text was also painted or gilded, Harrison 1989, 81–4. On the inscription and a discussion of its form, content, and arrangement, Connor 1999; Mary Whitby 2006. The entablature inscription from Ss. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople, erected by the emperor Justinian I around the same time, is also in relief, though not quite as high relief: Van Millingen 1912, fig. 20; Mercati 1925. On later medieval uses of carved relief inscriptions, Mitchell 2000, especially 349–50.

27 οἶκον . . . λάμποντα: *AG* 1.10.69.

28 χρυσοφόρου ἀκτῖνας: *AG* 1.10.57.

29 παγχρύσεον ἱερὸν ὄμμα: *AG* 1.10.42–7.

30 Including the lengthy (and beautifully carved) Greek inscription on the eighth-century lintel from the so-called "Hanging Church" (al-Muallaqa), now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo: Peers 2007.

31 Including a number of the silver vessels from sixth- or seventh-century Syria, e.g. Mundell Mango 1986, 108–11, no. 15 (flask).

32 *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 68–9, trans. Trombley and Watt 2000, 86–7, italics added for emphasis. Interestingly, the recipient of the miraculous egg, Areobindus, *magister militum per Orientem*, was the husband of Anicia Juliana, the patron of St. Polyeuktos and its own relief inscription, previously discussed.

33 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 1.29–31, trans. Cameron and Hall 1999, 81–2; discussed later in this chapter.

34 Mundell Mango 1986, 108–11, cat. 15.

35 On touching as authentic, "truthful" experience, James 2011a; Betancourt 2016b.

36 The best-preserved group of painted inscriptions from the Roman period survives at Pompeii, where most of the texts are election advertisements: Franklin 1980. Similar coloristic evidence survives from painted (and carved) tombstones at Zoora (modern Ghor es-Safi in Jordan), which preserve a number of different uses of color to highlight lines, words, or even individual letters: Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005. The best (and best-illustrated) publication of extant mosaic inscriptions is the corpus of mosaics from Jordan: Piccirillo 1993.

37 Discussed by James 1996, 73.

38 E.g. the main mosaic dedicatory inscription of the Church of Ss. Cosmas and Damian (533), written in white tesserae in a red-ground *tabula ansata*: Piccirillo 1993, 288 fig. 538.

39 E.g. several of the epitaphs from the Church of Priest Felix at Kélibia in Tunisia, now in the Bardo Museum in Tunis: on these, Cintas and Duval 1958.

40 For examples in floor mosaics, Leatherbury 2014. Green inscriptions sometimes appeared on walls, including the late fourth-century mosaic inscription written in green glass tesserae that extends over the top of a lunette in the Catacomb of Domitilla in Rome, identifying Christ (depicted in the mosaic below) as both Son and Father, "You who are said to be the Son and are found to be the Father," *Qui filius diceris et pater invenieris*: Mathews 1993, 53, who points out the Arian undertones of the text.

41 Red had been a popular color for writing for many centuries: on the use of red ink on the production of (papyrus) texts in Egypt, see Posener 1951; Eyre 2013, 47–8.

42 Piccirillo 1993, 303 fig. 593, 306; Gatier 1998, 383–92, nos. 73, 76 (S. 2506, 2448). The text reads: "From the offering of the donor, whom God knows, have mercy on him. Under the archbishop Theodore [the church] of St. George was decorated with mosaic through the zeal of the deacon and *paramonarios* Kasiseos," Ἐκ προσφορᾶς / τοῦ διδουτα, ὡ θεὸς ὖ/δεν τίς ἠστίν, ἐλέισον / αὐτοῦ· ἠπὶ Θεωδώρου / ἀρχηηπισκόπου ἐψη/φόθη τοῦ ἁγίου Γεοργίου σπου/δῖς Κασισεου δ(ιακόνου) / (καὶ) παραμονα/ρίου. The other dedicatory inscription in the church, placed in front of the chancel barrier, is also written in red tesserae.

43 See e.g. Gage 1993.

44 Pliny, *Natural History* 33.36–42; on his account, Bradley 2009, 94–7. Pliny's account is somewhat confusing even as it tries to enumerate the differences between the various types of red pigment, some of which appear to have confused people even in the

Roman period. While these differences did in fact make a *material* difference in the period, both in terms of cost and in terms of hue and brilliance, we are not in a position to evaluate them, as the compositions of red pigments from inscriptions have not been adequately tested. On the composition of ancient paintings generally, see Brinkmann and Wünsche 2004, 239–43.

45 According to Pliny, set at 70 denarii, a *very* high price and many times the cost of red ocher, a cheaper substitute: *NH* 33.40. Unfortunately, we have little information about the production of *minium* or any other red pigment that postdates the account of Pliny, which derives in large part from the earlier (first-century BCE) account of Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, 7.7.2, 7.8–9, and (on the overuse of *minium*) 7.5.8. However, at least some of this information was still in circulation in the third and fourth centuries CE, as it shows up in the abridged version of Vitruvius published by Marcus Cetius Faventinus, *De Diversis Fabricis Architectonicae* 27, ed. Plommer 1973, commentary on 106–7.

46 Pliny, *Natural History* 33.42: *Minium in voluminum quoque scriptura usurpatur clarioresque litteras vel in muro vel in marmore, etiam in sepulchris, facit*.

47 The Pompeiian inscriptions are published by Franklin 1980; see also Keppie 1991, 15, who points out that some museums actually re-color inscriptions with modern red paint, which produces a much more saturated and clumsy visual effect than that of the original pigment.

48 These include the Chapel of Aaron and the main church on Jebel Haroun: Frösén, Sironen, and Fiema 2008, 273–80, figs. 49–53; as well as several exterior inscriptions, including the inscribed text of Psalm 33 (34):6 from the exterior architrave of the Church of the Aedicula at Umm al-Rasas: Piccirillo 1987, especially 216–17, pl. 25, photo 35, and Piccirillo and Alliata 1994, 263–4, no. 21, tav. 26, 5; and a funerary inscription from the entrance of the burial complex of the Monastery of St. Theoctistus (Deir Muqallik) in the Judean Desert: Patrich and Di Segni 1987, especially 277 [Hebrew]; Goldfus, Arubas, and Alliata 1995. Elsewhere in the Mediterranean, survivals are even rarer, but see several red-painted inscriptions from a tomb in the necropolis at Callatis (modern Mangalia in Romania) on the Black Sea coast: Felle 2009, 235–6, figs. 6–8, with previous bibliography. From a slightly earlier period, a number of the second- and third-century temples in Dura Europos also featured red-painted dedications, including the Temple of Adonis: Rostovtzeff, Brown, and Welles 1939. Other examples survive from Aphrodisias, e.g. Roueché 2004, no. 61.

49 The dedicatory inscription is published in Dayagi-Mendels and Rosenberg 2010, 159. The other inscriptions have not yet been properly published, but see Vito 1993; Vito 1995; Fine 2005b; Ben David 2011. On the latter (mosaic) text, also Sussman 1981.

50 Vito 1993; Fine 2005b.

51 Dayagi-Mendels and Rosenberg 2010, 159.

52 The inscription, now in the Rockefeller Museum, reads: "In the time of Aedos, priest, [the church] was built in the year 3 . . ." ἐπὶ Ἀεδου πρεσβυτέρου ἐκτίσθη ἐν ἔτι τ. . . . The date, most likely in the fifth or sixth century, is problematic because the era employed is unclear: Kirk 1937, no. 1, 1938, no. 4; Rosenthal-Heginbottom with Chen 1982, 105–6, no. 25, Taf. 71a.

53 Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 12. Nonnus was quite a "visual" writer: see Miguélez-Cavero 2008, 121–53; Agosti 2014, 141–74; Kristensen 2016.

54 Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 12.32–5, ed. and trans. Rouse 1940, 398–9.

55 γράμματα φοινίσσοντα, σοφῇ κεχαραγμένα μίλτῳ: *Dionysiaca* 12.67–9, ed. Rouse 1940, vol. 1, 400–2.

56 Pliny, *Natural History* 33.38. Homer also uses the term μίλτος to refer to the reddish color of the prows of Odysseus's ships: *Iliad* 2.637.

57 James 1996, 73.

58 On red in the Roman world, André 1949, 75–122; Janes 1998, 150–1; Bradley 2009, 37, 40–1.

59 For example, the fourth-century apse inscription (no longer extant) erected in the Church of St. Agnes by Constantina, daughter of the emperor Constantine, mentioned the gold mosaic of the golden summits (*aurea . . . fastigia*) of the roofs, which gleamed reddish (*rutilant*): *ICUR* 2, 44s; *ILCV* 1, 1768. Prudentius uses the word to describe the golden ceiling of the martyrium of St. Eulalia: "The vibrating roofs above gleam red with paneled gold [either mosaic or gilded wood]" (*Tecta corusca super rutilant de laquearibus aureolis*), Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 3.196–7; on the term's emphasis on the luminosity and saturation of the color, André 1949, 87–8. On the practice of painting the preparatory ground of mosaics red, Schibille 2012, 56; generally on wall mosaics and color and material, James 2017, 46–95.

60 Janes 1998, 105–52, who also discusses the shiny valence of purple (*purpureus*), used to describe the peacock's shine in the inscription from Sant'Agnese (*ILCV* 1, no. 1769).

61 Ἀναστὰς γὰρ μεθ' ὕπνον τοῦ στρώματος, κατ'αὐτοῦ τῆς νυκτὸς τὸ μεσότατον, καὶ λαβὼν σινοπίδιον (χρῶμα τοῦτο φλογὶ παραπλήσιον) ταῦτα τῷ τοίχῳ τῷ πρὸ τῆς πύλης τοῦ τεμένους ἔνθα κατέκειτο γέγραφεν· «Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης πόλεως τῆς Ῥώμης ὁρμώμενος, τυφλὸς ὀκτὼ χρόνους γενόμενος, ἐνθάδε διὰ τῆς τῶν ἁγίων Κύρου καὶ Ἰωάννου δυνάμεως προσκαρτερήσας ἀνέβλεψα.»: Sophronius of Jerusalem, *Miracles of Ss. Cyrus and John* 69, *PG* 87, 3664, trans. Vikan 2010, 72.

62 The pigment was named after the city Sinope in Asia Minor, from which it supposedly came: Pliny, *Natural History* 33.40.

63 McKenzie 2007, 249–50.

64 Mitchell 2004a, especially 159–62. If they are indeed late antique in date, these tiled texts predate the next extant appearance of similar inscriptions in Greek, on the land walls of Constantinople (under Leo III), by two hundred or more years: noted by Mitchell 2004a, 178 n. 72.

65 On the use of some of these strategies in North African funerary mosaics, whose inscriptions exhibit a remarkable degree of visual flexibility, Leatherbury 2014.

66 On red-black inscriptions in Classical and Hellenistic Greece, Robert 1955, especially 211 nn. 1–2. Roman carvers used red and black pigment for the *fasti* (calendars), including the Republican calendar, the Fasti Antiates Maiores, found carved onto a column at Antium (modern Anzio, south of Rome): Michaels 1967; Hannah 2005, 102–6. Near Umm al-Rasas, a related visual strategy was used for the labels on the famous Madaba Map, on which the Greek names of regions are written in red (*Iouda*, etc.) and the names of cities and biblical sites are written in black (or, occasionally, in red): see the discussion in Chapter 5.

67 Leatherbury 2014.

68 As on tombstones from the necropolis at Zoora (modern Ghor es-Safi) in Jordan: e.g. Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005, 245–7, nos. 149–50, color pl. VIII. Black-and-red alternation is seen in a number of painted inscriptions from Dura Europos, now in storage at the Yale University Art Gallery, e.g. 1938.5999.1911.

69 In the period, the fifth-century Freer Codex (also called the Codex Washingtonensis) features red rubrics for the beginning of the books of Deuteronomy (first three lines) and Joshua (first two lines): Brown 2006, 267–8. Red ink was used in a similar fashion on some papyri as well, including on the apocryphal gospel P.Oxy.840, on which red was used for punctuation marks and *nomina sacra*: Kruger 2005, 48–9. On these, Kruger 2012, 24 n. 44; also Kendrick 1999, 75–9. Christians continued to use alternating red lines of text for their calendars through the Middle Ages: Rüpke 2011, 154.

70 On the use of color alternation to encourage ease of memorization in the medieval period, Carruthers 1990, 9, 121–2. While color alternation is not explicitly theorized in the late antique period, the popularity of the practice testifies to its effectiveness as a visual strategy that enhances the readability of texts.

71 On Optatian and his poems, Levitan 1985; Squire 2011, 219–22; Pelttari 2014, 75–84; Squire 2015a; Squire and Wienand 2017, especially Squire 2017a; Squire 2017b; Squire and Whitton 2017. Other late antique authors whose manuscript traditions feature color

alternation include Venantius Fortunatus, whose verses often include multicolored acrostics: on these, see Graver 1993; on later examples of *carmina figurata*, especially those of the Carolingian poet Hrabanus Maurus, see Chazelle 2001, 75–131. The bibliography on the figured poems of antiquity has ballooned of late: see especially Doria 1979; Ernst 1991; previous scholarship summarized and discussed in Squire 2015a, 2017a. For a discussion of figured poems in later Byzantine traditions, Drpić 2016a, 219–30.

72 Optatian, Poem 19, ed. Polara 1973, vol. 1, 72–5, 2004, 169–75; Squire 2015a, 105–21, with additional bibliography.

73 Optatian, Poem 19, ed. Polara 1973, vol. 1, 72–5, 2004, 174:

> *Navita nunc tutus contemnat, summe, procellas;*
> *nigras nunc tutus contemnat, summe, procellas;*
> *tutus contemnat summis cumulate tropaeis;*
> *pulsa mente mala contemnat, summe, procellas;*
> *spe quoque Roma bona contemnat, summe, procellas*.

74 Optatian, Poem 19, ed. Polara 1973, vol. 1, 72–5, 2004, 174: *Roma felix floret semper votis tuis*.

75 Τὴν ναῦν δεῖ κόσμον, σὲ δὲ ἅρμενον εἰνὶ νομίζιν / θούροις τεινόμενον σῆς ἀρετῆς ἀνέμοῖς: Polara 1973, vol. 1, 73, 2004, 174; trans. Squire 2015a, 114–15, slightly adapted.

76 Miller 2009, 50–2.

77 *Prodentur minio caelestia signa legenti*: Optatian, Poem 19.1, ed. Polara 1973, vol. 1, 74, 2004, 172.

78 The inscription reads "+ In the time of the most God-beloved priest and *hegumen* Stephanos, the mosaic of the baptistery was made in the month of December, of the fourth year of the indiction, in the time of our most pious and Christ-loving emperor Maurice, in his first consulate," [+] Ἐπὶ τοῦ θεοφιλ(εστάτου) Στε/[φ]άνου πρεσβ(υτέρου) καὶ ἡγου/μένου ἐγένετο ἡ ψή/φωσις τοῦ φωτιστη/ρίου ἐν μη(νὶ) Δεκεμβρίῳ / ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) τετάρτη[ς] ἐπὶ τοῦ / εὐσεβ(εστάτου) καὶ φιλοχ(ρίστο)υ ἡ/μῶν βασιλέως Μαυρικίου / ὑπατίας πρώτης +: Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 103–4, no. 172, with previous bibliography.

79 The frescoes are dated to c. 705–710: Felle 2006, no. 654, p. 309–10, tav. XI, 20; also Nordhagen 1968, 47–8, pls. LIII, LXVI; De Rubeis 2001, 104–21.

80 Although "shining" (λαμπρός) is also a color according to Plato, it is elided with the word for "white" (λευκός) by the later Byzantine period: James 1996, 47–80.

81 On the Rossano Gospels, also called the Codex Purpureus, see the facsimile edition of Cavallo, Gribomont, and Loerke 1987; Sevrugian 1990. On purple manuscripts generally, see Janes 1998, 92–3; Lowden 1999. Later medieval inscriptions echo this visual effect even more precisely, as at the Carolingian monastery church at Corvey, where an inscription in gilt bronze capital letters was set into a bed of local purple sandstone in the Westwerk of the church: Lobbedey and Westphal 1998; Hamburger 2014, 33.

82 E.g. the late fourth- or fifth-century epitaph of the infant Gallica, written in white tesserae on a black ground in Basilica A at Sétif, in modern Algeria: Février 1965, 75, no. A7, fig. 69 (and illustrated in color on the book cover). This inscription also features guidelines in light brown tesserae and is framed quite colorfully, with two lines of red tesserae separated by a black line, and surrounded by a green and red garland.

83 Susini 1973; Edmondson 2015.

84 Lassus 1959, 143–6; Susini 1973, 18–19.

85 The text is *CIJ* 809 and reads, "Eupithis, in fulfillment of a vow, for her own salvation and that of her husband and her children and all her household, made the (mosaic of) the place" (Εὐπίθις εὐξαμένη / ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας αὐ/τῆς καὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς / καὶ τῶν τέκνων / καὶ παντὸς τοῦ οἴκου / αὐτῆς τὸν τόπον ἐποίησεν): Sukenik 1950–1951, 549, no. 18; Lifshitz 1967, no. 44; Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 112–13, no. 71. On the synagogue mosaics, see Hachlili 1998, 198–204.

86 The inscription reads: "In the time of the most illustrious *archisynagogoi* Eusebius and Nehemiah and Phineas, and the *gerousiarch* Theodore and the most illustrious priests Isaac and Saul and the rest, Ilasius, *archisynagogos* of the Antiochians made the mosaic of the entrance for 150 feet. Year 703 (391 CE), the seventh of the month of Audynaios. A blessing to all!" Ἐπὶ τῶν τιμιοτάτων ἀρχισυνα/γώγων Εὐσεβίου καὶ Νεμίου καὶ Φινέου / καὶ Θεοδώρου γερουσιάρχου καὶ τῶν / τιμιοτάτων πρεσβυτέρων Εἰσακίου / καὶ Σαούλου καὶ λοιπῶν Ἰλάσιος ἀρχισυνά/γωγος Ἀντιοχέων ἐποίησεν τὴν (ε)ἴσοδον τοῦ / ψηφίου πό(δας) ρν΄ ἔτους γψ΄Αὐδυνέου ζ΄. Εὐλογία πᾶσι: Sukenik 1950–1951, 543–4, no. 1; Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 86–9, no. 53.

87 The second dedication reads: "Ilasios, (son) of Isaac, *archisynagogos* of the Antiochenes, made the mosaic of the entrance for the salvation of his wife Photion and his children and for the salvation of his mother-in-law Eustathia and for the memory of Isaac and Edesius and Hesychius, his ancestors. Peace and mercy to all your holy people," Ἰλάσιος Εἰσακίου ἀρχισυνάγωγος Ἀντιοχέ/ων ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας Φωτίου συμβίου καὶ τέκνων / καὶ ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας Εὐσταθίας πενθερᾶς / καὶ ὑπὲρ μνίας Εἰσακίου καὶ Ἐδεσίου καὶ Ἡσυχί/ου προγόνων ἐποίησεν τὴν ψήφωσιν / τῆς (ε)ἰσόδου. Εἰρήνη καὶ ἔλεος ἐπὶ πᾶν / τὸ ἡγιασμένον ὑμῶν πλῆθος: Sukenik 1950–1951, 544–5, no. 2; Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 89–94, no. 54.

88 For example, a fragmentary donation: Sukenik 1950–1951, 550, no. 20; Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 110–11, no. 69.

89 Seven of these are extant, though more probably existed: Sukenik 1950–1951, 547–8, nos. 10–15; Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 103–8, nos. 61–7.

90 Leatherbury 2014.

91 Foucher 1960, cat. 57.164, pl. 38.

92 Stone, Amit, Seligman, and Zilberbod 2011, 230–5.

93 *AE* 1979.0682; see Marrou 1979. On the Christian commemorative meal, known in the Roman period as the *refrigerium*, Rebillard 2009, 140–75.

94 On the use of similar visual strategies in later medieval churches in Rome, Riccioni 2011.

95 Dunbabin 1999a, 114–15, 122, 128. Glass was used in figural floor mosaics, as in the late Roman villa mosaics at Antioch-on-the-Orontes, to achieve special colors (such as blues, greens, or oranges) or optical effects: Levi 1947, vol. 1, 630–2. Sometimes, glass tesserae were used in the depiction of actual jewels, as in the necklace of a figure of Nike who holds up a *tabula ansata* in the Building on the Point at Anemurium, dated to the second quarter of the fourth century: Campbell 1998, 1–2.

96 Leatherbury 2014.

97 Including the double epitaph of two women, Florentina and Concessa, in which only the name of the first is glazed: Cintas and Duval 1958, 197, no. 37, pl. XXIa; Yasin 2005, 446–7, 2009, 93–4, fig. 2.9.

98 *Hermes coniugi et fil(iis) dulcissimus*: now in the Sousse Museum: Gauckler 1910, 24–6, no. 18; Leynaud 1922, 248–50 fig. 48, 313 fig. 65; Foucher 1960, cat. 57.206, pl. 47a. Other similar texts include the epitaph of Billatica, from the cemetery at Lemta, now in the Bardo Museum, dated to 453 or 562 (depending on the era used): *CIL* 8 Supp., 11128; Gauckler 1910, no. 103.

99 Avi-Yonah and Makhouly 1933.

100 *Donata inno(cens) / vivis in pace*: Ben-Abed and Duval 1997, no. 5.

101 As in the Megalopsychia mosaic from the Yakto Complex, now in the Antioch Mosaic Museum: Levi 1947, vol. 1, 630.

102 Including the *syrinx* held by the musician in the central emblema from Room 10 of the fifth- or early sixth-century phase of the House of Stone Carpets in Ravenna: Montevecchi 2004, 103–9, 108 fig. 158 (detail).

103 The church was later replaced by the famous Octagon Church in the fifth century: Pelekanides 1976–1977, 71–4, 1980; Feissel 1983, 192, no. 226, pl. LIII; Lazaridou 2011, 135, cat. 96, with further bibliography. In the medieval period, gold was also used to highlight sacred names in manuscripts: Hamburger 2014, 33–7, fig. 23.

104 Lazaridou 2011, 135, cat. 96.
105 In the late fourth century, Jerome condemned these expensive books: "let those who want to have their old books or purple parchment picked out with gold and silver . . . as long as they leave me . . . books that are correct rather than beautiful." (*Habeant qui volunt veteres libros, vel in membranis purpureis auro argentoque descriptos . . . dummodo mihi, meisque permittant pauperes habere schedulas, et non tam pulchros codices, quam emendaios*.): Jerome, *Preface to the Book of Job*, *PL* 28, 1083–4; trans. Cameron 2010, 495.
106 Letters were either attached with nails or with attached tangs that projected from their reverses: Thunø 2007, 2011a, 2011b, 2015, 111–17; Edmondson 2015, 122, 128.
107 The texts of the two inscriptions, erected in 315, are identical (*CIL* 6, 1139), and read: "To the Emperor Caesar Flavius Constantine the Great, pious and fortunate Augustus, the Senate and the People of Rome, because with the inspiration of divinity and greatness of mind, with his just army, by just arms he avenged the state both from the tyrant [Maximian] and from all of his faction at the same time, dedicated this arch as a symbol of triumphs," trans. Bardill 2012, 222–7, slightly adapted; also Thunø 2007, 26–8; Lenski 2008. Bronze letters occasionally survive separated from their monuments: for an example from Mérida, see Sabio Gonzalez, Alonso Lopez, and Hidalgo Martin 2014, 54.
108 Janes 1998.
109 Keppie 1991, 91.
110 *Romae et Augusto Caesari divi f(ilio) patri patriae*: Kähler 1970, 38, fig. 41. A similarly simple (though slightly longer) text adorned the façade of the temple at Nîmes in France (also known as the Maison Carrée), whose date and dedication are disputed: *CIL* 12, 3156; Amy and Gros 1979, vol. 1, 177–95; Anderson, Jr. 2001.
111 ἐν λίθῳ, ἤτοι μαρμάρῳ, χαλκέοις γράμμασιν: John Malalas, *Chronicle* 4.8, who reinterprets the prophecy as foretelling the birth of Christ: see Agusta-Boularot 2006, 103–5.
112 Mitchell 1991.
113 The inscription is *RCEA* 1, no. 27; also Fowden 2004, 164–5.
114 A point also made by Thunø 2015, 111–17.
115 On the thickness of the metallic layer of golden tesserae, James 2006, 45–6, 2017, 35–6, 115 (Table 5), 117–18.
116 Brusin and Zovatto 1957, nos. 1–2; Caillet 1993, 153–4, nos. 10–11; Yasin 2009, 123–4; Kiilerich 2011, 46. These tesserae are different from gold-glass tesserae used to produce wall and vault mosaics, as they were made with a sheet of gold set between two layers of dark blue rather than clear glass, as was typical in the period: James 2006.
117 The text survives in poor condition today: *ILCV* 1, no. 1843; Kaufmann 1917, 403, Bild 236.
118 Thunø 2015, 47–51.
119 *Culmen apostolicum cum Caelestinus haberet / primus et in toto fulgeret episcopus orbe,/ haec quae miraris fundavit presbyter Urbis / Illyrica de gente Petrus, vir nomine tanto / dignus, ab exortu Christi nutritus in aula, / pauperibus locuples, sibi pauper, qui bona vitae / praesentis fugiens meruit sperare futuram*: *ICUR*, 2, 24, 111; *ILCV* 1, no. 1778; see Thunø 2007, 2011a, 2015, 107–11.
120 According to Malalas, the inscription read "the work of emperor Theodosius," ἔργον Θεοδοσίου βασιλέως: John Malalas, *Chronicle* 14.13.84–6; see Agusta-Boularot 2006, 129, no. 24.
121 These included texts in the churches of Santi Cosma e Damiano (to be discussed shortly in this chapter); San Lorenzo fuori le mura (discussed in Chapter 5); Santo Stefano Rotondo; and Sant'Agnese (also to be discussed shortly).
122 Including the text that ran around the walls of the small *cappella arcivescovile* (Cappella di San Andrea) at the episcopal palace in Ravenna: *CIL* 11, 1, 260; preserved in

Andreas Agnellus, *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis* 50, ed. Deliyannis 2006, 214–15; also Mackie 2003, 104–15; Ivanovici 2016.

123 For example, the inscription recording the sixth-century (c. 510) renovation of the earlier Church of St. Felix, originally built by Paulinus of Nola: Ebanista 2000; Lehmann 2004, 135–8, color pl. 33.

124 In the apse of the Basilica Eufrasiana: Terry and Maguire 2007.

125 As in the apse of the sixth-century (Justinianic) church in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai: Ševčenko 1966, 263 no. 7; Leatherbury 2016a.

126 "+A life-giving spring, receiving, nourishing faithful souls, is this all-honored house. Having made a vow, I attained to it, and having attained to it, I fulfilled it. ++On behalf of a vow of she whose name God knows," +Πηγὴ ζ[ω]τική, δεκτική, θρεπτικὴ ψυχῶν πιστῶν ὁ παν[έντιμος οἶ]κος οὗτος. [Εὐξαμ]ένη ἐπέτυχα καὶ ἐπιτυχο[ῦσ]α ἐπλήρωσα. ++Ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς [ἧς οἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ ὄνομα]: most usefully, Feissel 1983, 97–9; Nasrallah 2010. Agnellus also records a dedicatory-funerary verse inscription made of silver tesserae in the atrium of San Vitale, either on the wall or (perhaps) on the floor: Agnellus, *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravvenatis* 61, ed. Deliyannis 2006, 231; *CIL* 3, 1, 292.

127 Khamis 2001.

128 Kessler 1970; Whelan 1998; Nees 2011; Milwright 2016. On the other inscriptions of the building, including the lost text written onto the *qibla* wall, Flood 2001, 247–51. Bierman 1998, 52–4, focuses on the ways that the caliph al-Walid used similar materials for the inscriptions of the al-Aqsa mosque and the Great Mosque in Damascus to connect his texts, and thus his buildings, back to the Dome of the Rock.

129 The chapel dates to c. 800: Freeman and Meyvaert 2001.

130 The church was built by Arichis II, Duke (later prince) of Benevento, and featured inscriptions composed by Paul the Deacon: Mitchell 1994, especially 895–8, 2000, 353–5. The inscription did not survive, but it is likely that the text was set up on the interior (rather than the exterior), unlike the façade inscription from the church at the Monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno, which was written in foot-high metal letters: Mitchell 1991, 205–8.

131 Horace, *Odes* 3.30; see Fowler 2000, 197–8; Nisbet and Rudd 2004, 369.

132 Martial, *Epigrams* 8.3.5–8, trans. Rimell 2008, 58–9; see Fowler 2000, 211. Licinus was a freedman, previously a slave of Julius Caesar, who was later appointed governor of Gaul by Augustus, and was buried in a marble tomb on the Via Salaria outside Rome that was infamous for its size and extravagant materials, as attested by an epigram preserved in the *Latin Anthology* (attributed to Publius Terentius Varro Atacinus): "Licinus lies in a marble tomb, but Cato in a small and Pompey in none; do we believe the gods exist?" *Latin Anthology* 414, trans. Friedrich 2010, 371. On concerns about the preservation of tombs, frequently evident in funerary inscriptions, Hope 2000, 155–85; also Petrucci 1998.

133 E.g. Malalas, *Chronicle* 5.35; on Malalas, Agusta-Boularot 2006.

134 Στῆλαι καὶ γραφίδες καὶ κύρβιες εὐφροσύνης μὲν αἴτια τοῖς ταῦτα κτησαμένοις μεγάλης, ἀλλ᾽ἐς ὅσον ζώουσι . . . οὕτως οὔτε Πλάτων βρενθύεται οὔτ᾽ἄρ᾽Ὅμηρος χρώμασιν ἢ στήλαις, ἀλλὰ μόνῃ σοφίῃ: this passage is found in the preface to Agathias' poetry book, *AG* 4.5, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 194–5.

135 Ausonius, *Epitaphs* 32.7–10, trans. White 1968, 158–9.

136 For a recent survey of statue reuse and recarving in the Roman period, Varner 2015. This practice of reuse, especially reuse without recarving, was seen by some as confusing to viewers: Ma 2013, 74.

137 On the perceived durability of bronze, Corbier 2013, 23–4, who cites a law of the emperor Constantine that explicitly states that the text should be written on bronze tablets for preservation: preserved in the Theodosian Code, *Cod. Theod.* 12.5.2.

138 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 1.3, trans. Cameron and Hall 1999, 68. A similar sentiment is articulated by the first-century Jewish author Philo, who strongly condemns

those who set up pillars with honorary inscriptions to themselves instead of to God: Philo, *On Dreams* 1.242–7.

139 2 Cor 3:2–3: "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." On this passage, Heath 2013, 199–206.

140 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 1.28–9, trans. Cameron and Hall 1999, 81; on light as metaphor during the reign of Constantine, Carile 2016b.

141 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 1.29–31, trans. Cameron and Hall 1999, 81–2; on this symbol, Squire and Whitton 2017; Garipzanov 2018, 50–65.

142 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 1.28, trans Cameron and Hall 1999, 81. The statue with its inscription is recorded in the *Life*, 1.40, trans. Cameron and Hall 1999, 85; also in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 9.9.10–11. The placement and wording of the inscription is uncertain due to inconsistencies in Eusebius's accounts, as is the number of times that the text (and the cross or Chi-Rho, another uncertainty) was inscribed on Constantine's monuments: on this confusion, also Van Dam 2011, 201–2; Bardill 2012, 126–50.

143 *[T]amquam si nomen Domini et auro et atramento scribatur illud est pretiosus, illud vilius; quod tamen in utroque significatur, idipsum est:* Augustine, *On the Trinity* 3.10.20, trans. Haddan 1905, 64, with slight adaptations.

144 On Augustine and his attitudes towards texts, Cary 2008; also Squire and Whitton 2017.

145 Discussed previously; also see Kendrick 1999, 89–96.

146 Janes 1998; Brown 2012.

147 Leontius of Neapolis, *Life of St. John the Almsgiver* 20, trans. Dawes and Baynes 1948, 229.

148 On this motif in literature and art, Baynes 2012, 65–84.

149 Prudentius, *Crowns of Martyrdom* 1.3, trans. Thomson 1953, 99, who contrasts the inscription of the names of the martyrs in heaven in "letters of gold" (*aureis litteris*).

150 Prudentius, *Crowns of Martyrdom* 3.136–40: "*Scriberis ecce mihi, Domine. Quam iuvat hos apices legere qui tua, Christi, tropaea notant! Nomen et ipsa sacrum loquitur purpura sanguinis eliciti*," trans. Thomson 1953, 151, slightly adapted; on this episode, Ross 2008, 50–80; Miller 2009, 57. For Prudentius, the body of another martyr, Cassian, becomes a page wet with red ink as his murderous students stab him with the sharp tips of their styluses: Prudentius, *Crowns of Martyrdom* 9, Thomson 1953, 222–9; on this episode's ekphrastic workings, Kaesser 2002; Grig 2004, 114–15; Miller 2009, 69–73; O'Hogan 2016, 51–70; Hershowitz 2017, 126–34.

151 For an extended discussion of Prudentius and the issue of *tituli*, see Chapter 5.

152 *Pudet videlicet doctos homines ex discipulis Platonis fieri discipulos Christi, qui piscatorem suo Spiritu docuit sapere ac dicere, In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum, hoc erat in principio apud Deum. Omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil. Quod factum est, in ipso vita erat; et vita erat lux hominum, et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt. Quod initium sancti Evangelii, cui nomen est, Secundum Joannem, quidam Platonicus, sicut a sancto sene Simpliciano, qui postea Mediolanensi Ecclesiae praesedit episcopus, solebamus audire, aureis litteris conscribendum, et per omnes Ecclesias in locis eminentissimis proponendum esse dicebat. Sed ideo viluit superbis Deus ille magister, quia Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis: ut parum sit miseris quod aegrotant, nisi se in ipsa etiam aegritudine extollant, et de medicina qua sanari poterant, erubescat. Non enim hoc faciunt ut erigantur, sed ut cadendo gravius affligantur*: Augustine, *City of God* 10.29, *PL* 41.309; trans. Watson 2013, 95.

153 Watson 2013, 95; On the impact of his meetings with Simplicianus on Augustine's Christian faith, Courcelle 1950, 168–74; Dobell 2009, 104–5; also Thunø 2011a, 279, 2015, 114.

154 Only one example with a context survives from the late antique period, on a marble (bread?) stamp found in the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu in Jerusalem: see Felle 2006, no. 216, with previous bibliography. A second object, a small inscribed amethyst with no findspot, bears a portion of the line in Greek: Felle 2006, no. 806.

155 *Scripta sunt caelo duorum maryrum vocabula, aureis quae Christus illuc adnotavit litteris, sanguinis notis eadem scripta terris tradidit*: Prudentius, *Crowns of Martyrdom* 1.1–3, trans. Thomson 1953, 99.

156 On the mosaics, Mackie 1995.

157 *The Life and Miracles of St. Thekla* (hereafter *Mir.*), ed. Dagron 1978.

158 *Mir.* 10.1, ed. Dagron 1978, 61–3; trans. Johnson 2012a, 39. This earlier church was replaced by a monumental basilica in 476 CE: Davis 2001, 38.

159 *Mir.* 10.1, trans. Johnson 2012a, 39.

160 *Mir.* 10.2, trans. Johnson 2012a, 39, his italics preserved: Ὁ δὲ τοῦτο ἐπιταχθεὶς σφῦράν τε καὶ κολαπτῆρα λαβὼν καὶ διὰ πάσης ἐγκαρτερήσας ἡμέρας παίων καὶ κολάπτων, πάντα τρόπον ἀνορύττειν αὐτὰ πειρώμενος, τὰ μὲν γράμματα τῆς μακαρίας ἐκείνης ὁμολογίας οὐδ' ὅλως ἐκίνησεν, ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἐπεχάραξεν, οὐδ' – ὅ φησιν Ὅμηρος – ἐπέγραψε, σκεπούσης αὐτὰ δηλονότι καὶ φυλαττούσης τῆς ἀχράντου καὶ ἀκηράτου καὶ παρθενικῆς ἐκείνης χειρὸς ὡς βασιλικὰ σήμαντρα, ὡς θεμέλια καὶ φυλακτήρια τῆς ὅλης πίστεως καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ νεὼ καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως. The Homeric phrase "scratch the surface" (ἐπέγραψε) refers to the failure to wound someone seriously in battle, e.g. Homer, *Iliad* 4.139, 11.388, 21.166.

161 *Mir.* 10.2, trans. Johnson 2012a, 39.

162 *Mir.* 10.2, trans. Johnson 2012a, 39–41. On the Arian beliefs of Symposios, who eventually converted to Orthodoxy in 381, Johnson 2012a, 418 n. 32.

163 Leatherbury 2016a.

164 On the use of the Latin term *metallum* for mosaics, Borsook 2000, especially 4–5; Thunø 2011a, 286, 2015, 111–17.

165 James 1996.

166 The inscription survives in anthology only: *ICUR* 2, 71, 134, 152, 353, 439; *ILCV* 1, no. 1784; also Ihm 1960, 138. On the mosaics, see especially Matthiae 1948, 19; Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 135–42; Oakeshott 1967, 90–4; Budriesi 1968, 113–33; Bovini 1971, 241–55. On the late eighth-century triumphal arch mosaic of the church, Wisskirchen 1999.

167 Including Paulinus's inscription placed in the apse of his church at Nola in Italy, whose first line reads, "In full mystery sparkles the Trinity" (*Pleno coruscate trinitas mysterio*): Paulinus, *Epistles* 32.10–11, trans. Goldschmidt 1940, 37.

168 For example, the inscription from the apse of the Basilica Eufrasiana at Poreč: Terry and Maguire 2007, vol. 1, 4–5; also the apse inscription of the San Venanzio Chapel at the Lateran Basilica in Rome: Ihm 1960*,* 143–4; Oakeshott 1967*,* 153–4; Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 181–90. On the chapel, also Mackie 2003, 333 n. 5, with additional bibliography. On the late antique significance of flash (*fulgor*), which carried the connotations of immediacy and drama, Miller 2009, 71.

169 For example, the inscription of the small apse in Santo Stefano Rotondo in Rome, which was recorded in the Lorsch Syllogue and restored in the apse in 1735: see Ihm 1960, 143–4; Oakeshott 1967, 153–4; Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 189 n. 1. A related text once appeared within Sant'Agnese fuori le mura in Rome: "The hall of the Virgin shines, adorned with varied metals": *Virginis aula micat, variis decorata metallis*: *ICUR* 2, 63, 89, 104, 137; *ILCV* 1, no. 1768.

170 Including the dedicatory inscription of San Paolo fuori le mura in Rome, c. 440–61: *ILCV* 2, no. 1761b. The Greek equivalent, λάμπω, features in a now-lost epigram in a church built by the consul Theodorus for the emperors Justin I and Justinian I, *AG* 1.98, ed. and trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 62–3: "glittering with the luster of a vast amount of metals (i.e. mosaics)," (λαμπόμενον στεροπῇσιν ἀμετρήτοιο μετάλλου). On this epigram, Alan Cameron 1976a. This inscription, ascribed to Gregory of

Nazianzus in the *Greek Anthology*, was probably set up in the apse or triumphal arch of his church at Nazianzus to refer to the golden mosaic set up there: Limberis 2011, 66–8. Other inscriptions include those in the Church of St. Stephen at Horvat Beʾer-Shema, which was "made shining" (λαμπροί(ν)ονται): Tzaferis 1996, 79–80, no. 7; and the Church of the Mother of God at Blachernae in Constaninople, described as "shining with beauty" (λαμπρόμενον): *AG* 1.3, trans Paton and Tueller 2014, 7.

171 Including the fourth-century inscription from Sant'Agnese in Rome: *ILCV* 1, no. 1769.

172 On these visual effects, Franses 2003; Pentcheva 2014; Schibille 2014; Pentcheva 2017.

173 Clarke 2002, 8: "words for shining such as *fulgeo* or *niteo* frequently carry the same emitive connotations as color terms like *candidus* (gleaming white) or *aureus*."

174 These churches included Santa Prassede: Oakeshott 1967, 204–12; Wisskirchen 1992. On Santa Prassede and other churches erected by Paschal, including Santa Cecila and San Maria in Domnica, Wisskirchen 1992; Goodson 2010, 149–58; Thunø 2015.

175 Arnulf 2004; followed by Thunø 2015, 47–51.

176 On these two ekphraseis, see Chapter 4.

177 *ILCV* 1, no. 1769. On the mosaics of the church, *Liber Pontificalis* 72.6, trans. Davis 1989, 66, which records Pope Honorius as the patron of the new apse mosaics; Frutaz 1960, especially 45–8; Ihm 1960, 141–3; Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 169; Oakeshott 1967, 148–50; Janes 1998, 167–9, who sees Sant'Agnese as the culmination of a trend towards increased use of gold in late antique churches. However, the presence of gleaming gold was of course not new to the church in the seventh century; the fourth-century apse inscription erected by Constantina, daughter of the emperor Constantine, mentions the gold mosaic of the golden summits ("*aurea . . . fastigia*"), of the roofs, which gleamed reddish (*rutilant*): *ILCV* 1, no. 1769. Interestingly, the text was also an acrostic, spelling out the dedication: "Constantina, to God" (*CONSTANTINA DEO*).

178 The text as it appears in the chapel today is almost entirely reconstructed of paint: *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis* 50, ed. Deliyannis 2006, 214–5, trans. Deliyannis 2004, 162, adaptated; also *CIL* 10, 1, 260:

> *Aut lux hic nata est aut capta hic libera regnat.*
> *Lex est ante venit c(ae)li decus unde modernum,*
> *aut privata diem pepererunt tecta nitentem,*
> *inclusumque iubar secluso fulget Olimpo.*
> *Marmora cum radiis vernant(ia) cerne serenis,*
> *cunctaque sidereo percu(ssa) in murice saxa*
> *auctoris pre(t)io splendescunt munera Petri.*
>
> Either light was born here, or captured here it reigns free.
> It is the law, from which comes the present glory of heaven,
> or the deprived roofs have given birth to shining day,
> and the enclosed radiance gleams forth as if from secluded Olympus.
> See the marble blooming with bright rays,
> and all the stones struck in starry purple shine in value,
> the gifts of the founder, Peter.

The language of the inscription resembles that of an inscription put up in the atrium of Old St. Peter's by Pope Symmachus in the early sixth century, preserved in the Codex Palatinus Vaticanus 591: *ICUR* 2, 53; *ILCV* 2, no. 1756. On the program, also see Ivanovici 2016, 109–23.

179 See especially Arnulf 2004. On the semantic range of shine in earlier Latin poetry, see especially André 1949, 135–6; Edgeworth 1992, 1–17; the useful concordance in Clarke 2002, 15 (*adfulgeo*), 83–9 (*fulgeo*), 97–8 (*mico*), 106–10 (*niteo*), 134–5 (*radio*); also Elsner 2007a. On earlier Greek language of "shine," Schwarzenberg 2000.

180 Thunø 2011a, 2011b, 2015, 111–17; also Borsook 2000.
181 The concept of "living writing" is borrowed from Thunø 2007.
182 Miller 2009, especially 62–81. The Tipasa inscription is *CIL* 8, 20903; de Pachtère 1911, 95–6, no. 397,4; Hamdoune 2016, 192–5. For the archaeological context of the church, Duval and Prevot 1975, 1; Duval 1981; Yasin 2005, 446–7.
183 Thunø 2015, 47–51.
184 On this phenomenon in Italy in particular, Cuscito 1989; Wataghin 2006, 287–309, especially 294–9; Thunø 2015, 107–11. This was also a popular literary trope from the period, seen in Procopius's description of Justinian I's church renovations, including that of the Church of Acacius in Constantinople which was transformed from a ruin into a paragon of "astonishing whiteness": Procopius, *On Buildings* 1.4.25–6.
185 *Culmen Apostolicum cum Caelistinus haberet / primus et in toto fulgeret episcopus orbe*: see *supra* n. 119. Other similar texts include the dedicatory inscription of the fourth-century Basilica of St. Paul at Pisidian Antioch, which describes the patron, Bishop Optimos, as having "shone forth" (διέλαμπεν): Mitchell and Waelkens 1998, 210–7; *SEG* 52–1388.
186 Trans. Terry and Maguire 2007, vol. 1, 4–5, with slight adaptations.
187 The discourse of *renovatio*, especially popular in the sixth century, reemerges in the ninth-century decorative and epigraphic programs of the churches of Pope Leo III and Paschal I in Rome, previously mentioned, including Santa Susanna, Santa Cecila and Santa Maria in Domnica: Goodson 2010*,* 52–4, 217 n. 88; Thunø 2011a, 285, 2015, 109.
188 *ICUR* 2, 71, 134, 152, 353, 439; *ILCV* 1, no. 1784; Ihm 1960, 138. On the influence of this inscription on Abbot Suger and his new abbey at Saint-Denis, Panofsky 1949, 164, 168; Thunø 2011b.
189 The chapel is not extant, but its inscription is preserved in *ICUR* 4, 4109; Alchermes 1995, especially 21; Goodson 2010, 183 n. 68. An even earlier text from the fourth-century phase of Sant'Agnese in Rome is perhaps the first occurance of this theme: "The hall of the Virgin glitters, adorned with varied metals, but shines even more, gleaming brighter with great merit" (*Virginis aula micat variis decorata metallis, sed plus namque nitet meritis fulgentior amplis*): *ICUR* 2, 63, 89, 104, 137; *ILCV* 1, no. 1768.
190 On Pseudo-Dionysius, Jeck 1992; Rorem 1993. On his theory of perception and its applicability to late antique art, Elsner 1994; Louth 2005; Nelson 2006; Schibille 2014, 171–98.
191 *De Coelesti Hierarchia,* 1.3, 121C–D, ed. Heil and Ritter 1991, 8–9, trans. Rorem 1993, 146. Similar ideas are articulated in church inscriptions, as in the triumphal arch mosaics of the church at Poreč, which depict Christ holding an open codex that proclaims "I am the true light" (*Ego sum lux vera*): Terry and Maguire 2007, vol. 1, 51–4, 137–9. While the mosaics were restored in the nineteenth century, the program appears to reflect its late antique predecessor.
192 On Christian epiphanic visions, often present in the apses of late antique churches, Belting-Ihm 1989; Bergmeier 2014; Thunø 2015, 105–17; generally Bergmeier 2018; on classical conceptions of epiphany, also Platt 2011.
193 Importantly, the significances of these materials are ancient, even Homeric, and the inscription explicitly plays with the classical hierarchy of value – even these permanent, lasting materials cannot compete with the all-protecting power of Christ: Mitford 1971, 352–7, nos. 201–4; Michaelides 1992, 40–3, nos. 45–7; Nicolau 2001, 14–16; Bowes 2011, 188–9.
194 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 10.4.43–4, ed. and trans. Lawlor and Oulton 2000, 424–5. On this as the first Christian ekphrasis, see Webb 1999. A similar concern about the magnificence of the church building is present in the work of Prudentius: O'Hogan 2016, 154–64.
195 On the "material turn," Miller 2009.

196 See especially the poems of Posidippus, written in the third century BCE, including his poems on gemstones (*Lithika*): on these works and their clever use of material and light effects, Petrain 2005; Elsner 2014b.

197 As in the late fourth- or early fifth-century South Church at Brescia: "Deacon Syrus tessellated this place with his family," *Syrus diac(onus) h(unc) l(ocum) t(essellauit) c(um) s(uis)*: *CIL* 5, 4842; Caillet 1993, 61–2. A number of secular epigrams from North African villas and baths describe their mosaic composition as *variis . . . tessellis*, as the inscription from a reception hall of a house at Tipasa: Gsell 1936, 119–20; Février 1984, 389.

198 For example, Baumann 1999, Anhang 13–14, 373, 376; on the terms used for artists, Donderer 1989.

199 Bees 1936–1938; Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1987a, 32–4; Donderer 1989, 18–19.

200 On the late antique visual aesthetic of the fragment, see especially Elsner 2000b, 2004; Miller 2009, ch. 2. On connections between this aesthetic and literature of the period, Agosti 2004–2005; Lobato 2012; Agosti 2015b.

201 On the ancient valence of the term, see the recent summary of Grand-Clément 2015; also Pentcheva 2014, 139–49. For specific textual examples from the Roman and late antique periods, Agosti 1997; Miguélez-Cavero 2008, 162–4.

202 This term is also found in mosaic inscriptions, as in the Basilica of St. Eufemia in Grado, Italy: Carlini 1980, vol. 2, 351–3; Caillet 1993, 226–7; Agosti 1997, 37. On the literary history of variety, Fitzgerald 2016, especially chapter 2, where he discusses the history of the "mosaic metaphor."

203 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1371a.25–8, 1416b.25–6, who specifies epic and epideictic; see Miguélez-Cavero 2008, 164–6.

204 Demetrios, *On Style* 164: "Charm [εὖχαρι] is expressed by means of embellishment through beautiful words. These contribute most to charm [χάριτας] as, for instance, 'the earth with its variegated embroidery [ποικίλλεται] of flowery garlands'"; trans. and analysis Miguélez-Cavero 2008, 166 n. 389.

205 On the use of the term in Greek literature, Bolling 1958; Detienne and Vernant 1991, 18–20. On *poikilia* in later Byzantine poetry, Pentcheva 2014, 139–49; Drpić 2016a.

206 For example, Philostratus uses the term to emphasize the polychromy of the works of art that he describes in his *Imagines*, written in the third century CE: Dubel 2009, 314–21.

207 As in the poetry of Nonnus: Miguélez-Cavero 2008, 162–6, on variety as used by Nonnus as a descriptor and as organizing poetic principle; also Fauth 1981; Piccardi 1985, 97–8, 150–4, 214–7; Agosti 2014, 157: "Recent scholarship extensively studied how deeply Nonnian style is characterized by chromatism, insistence on light and colors, 'precious words,' fragmentation of focus, miniaturization, brilliance of individual units rather than of the organic whole."

208 Thomas 2007, 209; Grand-Clément 2015.

209 Roberts 1989.

210 Horace, *Satires* 2.4.83–4.

211 Actually a description of the inscriptions that the Hellenistic tyrant Agathocles placed onto the towers of the "Little Harbor" of Syracuse: Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 16.83; see James 1996, 122–3; Maguire 2011a.

212 Pelekanides and Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1974, 142–3, no. 135; Michaelides 1992, 36, no. 38; Daszweski and Michaelides 1988, 88, 99, 103 fig. 15.

213 On the multiple meanings of the term *graphein*, see Chapter 1.

214 Feissel and Philippidis-Braat 1985, especially 296–7, no. 38, and 371, no. 137; Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1987a, 77–9, no. 21; Avramea 1988, 35–40.

215 On the refinedness (*leptotes*) of Callimachus, Gutzwiller 2007, 33–6. On the term's different meanings, Pollitt 1974, 194–6.

216 See the discussion in Chapter 1. The sixth-century prefect Cassiodorus also described cut marble pavements (*opus sectile*) in terms that similarly evoke fabric, in his *Variae* 1.6, trans. Davis-Weyer 1986a, 50: "thus the discolored surface of the marble is woven

into the loveliest of pictures." On the possibility that the "decorations of silver" could be wall mosaics, perhaps including silver tesserae, Hamarneh 2015. Glass tesserae (though not metallic ones) were found in the excavations of the church: Crowfoot 1931, 29.

217 E.g. Prudentius, *Crowns of the Martyrs* 12.49–54, from his ekphrasis on San Paolo fuori le mura in Rome: on this text, Brandenburg 2002. These tropes are present in inscriptions as well, including the Polyeuktos inscription with which we began the chapter: *AG* 1.10.57–66. On this *topos* as used by other authors, Onians 1980; Roberts 1989, 75–6, 2011–2012. On the Homeric origins and Roman development of the trope by authors such as Plutarch, Thomas 2007, 232.

218 As in Paul the Silentiary's *Ekphrasis on Hagia Sophia* 286–95, ed. De Stefani 2011, 19–20; trans. Bell 2009, 204; where the green marble bands on the floor of Hagia Sophia become rivers and the sea: Majeska 1978; Barry 2007; Pentcheva 2011; Baert 2017; Pentcheva 2017, 121–49. On metaphorical connections between textiles and text in antiquity, Fanfani, Harlow, and Nosch 2016.

219 James 1996, 122–3; Maguire 2011b, 2012.

220 Λίθον ἀπαστράπτοντα Θ(εο)ῦ χάριν ἔνθα κ(αὶ) ἔνθα, the beginning of a mosaic inscription placed inside the entrance to the Basilica of St. Demetrios at Nikopolis in Greece, dated to the sixth century: Kitzinger 1951a, 86–7; Agosti 2011–2012, 267–8; for further discussion, see Chapter 4.

221 *LSJ* s.v. κόσμος; see also Diller 1956. On the early history of the term, Finkelberg 1998. For Roman conceptions of *kosmos* (Latin *ornamentum*), Platt 2018; Squire 2018. On the term's use in later Byzantine poetry, Drpić 2016b, especially 54–7. On the use of images of the *kosmos* to articulate and shape communities in the medieval period, Anderson 2016.

222 On the Gerasa church, Rhoby 2009, 393–4; Evans with Ratliff 2012, 12; further discussion is in Chapter 1. On the Tegea church, Maguire 1987a, 24–8, who mentions the double meaning of the term *kosmos* in the inscription but hesitates to expand on its relevance because of the text's fragmentary character.

223 Maguire 1987a. A visual translation of some of these ideas may be seen in the *Christian Topography* of Kosmas Indicopleustes, a sixth-century traveler: Kominko 2013.

224 *Atria quae cernis uar[io for]mata decore, / squalida sub picto cae[latu]r marmore tellus, / longa uetustatis senio f[us]cau[e]ra[t a]etas. / Prisca en cesserunt magno nouitatis honori, / praesulis Haeliae studio praestante beati. / Haec sunt tecta pio semper deuota timori*: *CIL* 5, 149; Caillet 1993, 226–7, cat. 27, 7; Yasin 2009, 125–9. On the earlier church, built in the late fourth or fifth century, Brusin and Zovatto 1957, 453–500; Caillet 1993, 227. Caillet disagrees with the argument of Tavano that the inscription refers to the first church on the site, a small church of the late fourth or early fifth century: Tavano 1974, 177–99.

225 Balty 1972, 189–207, especially 192–3, pl. 75, 1–2; Balty 1976; Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 206–10; Balty 1992; Agosti 1997; connected to the Grado inscription also by Ivanovici 2016, 200–1. The church inscription was most recently edited as *SGO* 20/05/04.

226 For discussion of the arrangement and plan of the church, Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 212–4, fig. 192. The church was built on top of a structure (probably a school) decorated with a mosaic of the Seven Sages: Balty 1969, especially 171, pls. 50–1; Balty and Balty 1974, 267–79, especially 276; Balty 1976, 40.

227 Balty 1972, 189–207, 1976, 34, fig. 7; Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 206–10; Agosti 1997.

228 This trope is also found in the Polyeuktos inscription, in which the patron, Anicia Juliana, is praised for having built "countless churches all over the world": *AG* 1.10.31–2, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 13.

229 On late antique *opus sectile* decoration, Dunbabin 1999a, 254–66; Guidobaldi and Guidobaldi 1983, 486–523. On the meanings of marble in the period, many of which center around their geographic origins, Kinney 2011, especially 191–8; Schneider 2001.

230 Balty 1972, 189–207; Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 206–10; Agosti 1997.

231 Homer, *Odyssey* 1.1. Bishop Paul may have come across the word in one of the anthologies or proems of the *Odyssey* commonly used in schools: Agosti 1997. He may also have associated the word with the concept of πολυτροπία ("versatility"), interpreted by Neoplatonist authors such as Porphyry as a spiritual quality, or even seen Odysseus as a moral *exemplum*, as did Gregory of Nazianzus, *On Virtue* 1.2.10.406, *PG* 37, 709.

232 Euripides, *Hecuba* 131, trans. Kovacs 1995, 410–11. The term is quite rare, though not quite the *hapax* that Balty believed it to be (Balty 1976, 40–6), as it features in one of the surviving poems of Alcaeus, *Fragments* 69.6–7: Detienne and Vernant 1991, 35; Agosti 1997.

233 Balty 1976, 40–6, connects the inscription and the mosaic images of the gazelle, panther, and deer biting snake to the specific climate within the empire in 533, characterized by the desire for peace in the church. In terms of the inscription, the terms continued to be used as descriptors of people in the early Christian literary world in a similar fashion to the assimilation of Odysseus to Christ: Agosti 1997, 34; Miguélez-Cavero 2008, 163.

234 Ἕως μὲν γὰρ ἂν ὡς ἐν γραφῇ περιάγῃ τις τὰ χαράγματα σκιὰ τίς ἐστιν. Ὅταν δὲ τὸ ἄνθος ἐπαλείψῃ τις καὶ ἐπιχρίσῃ τὰ χρώματα, τότε εἰκὼν γίνεται: John Chrysostom, *Epistle to the Hebrews* 10.1, *Homily* 17.2, *PG* 63, 130A; see James 1996, 128–9. The use of colors to complete an image was not a new concept in late antiquity, and is present in the writings of Second Sophistic authors like Lucian and Philostratus the Elder: Dubel 2009, especially 309–10.

235 This relationship is first articulated in the Christian context in the New Testament in Hebrews 10.1 and developed by later authors, including Cyril of Alexander, e.g. *Epistles* 41.23; see Frank 2006. On its relationship to mosaic art in particular, Miller 2009, 176–9. On the classical history of the relationship between form and color, Elsner 2014a.

236 Jacob of Sarug, *Homily on Mar Ephrem*, 10–17, *PO* 47, 1, no. 209, 27–9; trans. Frank 2006, 37. On the use of rhetorical "colors" by writers to complete their verbal portraits, James 1996, 129–32.

237 *Lucidius fabricam picturae pompa perornat, ductaque qua fucis vivere membra putes*: trans. Kessler 1985a, 76; on this trope in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see especially Fuà 1973, 49–55; Männlein-Robert 2007a; Squire 2010a; Roberts 2011–2012, 115.

238 James 1996, 129; Peers 2001, 125.

239 Pelekanides and Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1974, 59–60, no. 17, with previous bibliography. On first-person prayers in church inscriptions, see the discussion in Chapter 4.

240 See, for example, John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Gospel of Matthew* 22.14.

241 *Passio sancti Chrysogoni et sanctae Anastasiae*, ed. Delehaye 1936, 221–49. Figures in the heavenly hierarchy, including Mary, were often described as wearing bejeweled clothing: Roberts 2011–2012, 118–20.

242 Deichmann 1974, 144–6; Dresken-Weiland 2016, 201–3.

243 οἶδε δὲ τέχνη / χρώμασι πορθμεῦσαι τὴν φρενὸς ἱκεσίην: Agathias, in *AG* 1.34.7–8, trans. Pizzone 2013, 79, who discusses this particular epigram and its implications for our understanding of Byzantine approaches to art.

244 Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 23, *PG* 46, 405C; trans. James 1996, 130.

3 Framing texts, framing belief

Late antique viewers were continuously confronted by words presented in different ways in the interiors of their sacred buildings. These texts, which themselves framed visitors' experiences of architecture and ritual, were most often bounded by rectangular, square, or circular forms that acted to separate them from surrounding images. Despite, or perhaps because of, the omnipresence of these regular "boxes," historians of ancient art all too frequently have overlooked their complex significances.[1] Words and images in buildings and on more portable objects were often framed multiply, with each set of framing devices performing particular functions within the overall decorative program.

Entering the basilica at Chlef (previously El Asnam, in Algeria) in the fifth century, congregants and the clergy were confronted with a series of vivid patterns on the pavement, made up of a number of framed mosaic panels.[2] While we do not know what images appeared on the walls of the church, the floor mosaics testify to the rich tradition of mosaic production in the region and, more importantly for our purposes, to the power of the frames of texts to shape experience and interpretation of the words inside. While there may have been a church at the site from the first half of the fourth century onwards, the surviving mosaics all appear to date to the fifth century. Towards the end of the fifth century, an apsidal shrine for a deceased bishop, Reparatus (d. 475), was installed at the west end of the church, requiring the abandonment of the old western entrance into the nave and the creation of new doors at the western ends of the aisles (Figure 3.1).[3]

Walking into the basilica from a door in the north aisle, congregants and the clergy were likely to have encountered the two texts inscribed in the pavement of the north aisle at the beginning of their visit. Immediately upon their entrance into the church, the first mosaic panel visitors would have encountered took the form of a labyrinth, a puzzle to be deciphered (Figure 3.2). While the panel is relatively small, about 2.5 meters square, the geometric pattern that it contains would have resonated powerfully for viewers of the period. A popular motif in North Africa, the labyrinth was associated with the tale of the Greek hero Theseus, who, with help from Ariadne, princess of Crete, was able to enter the labyrinth and slay the Minotaur, saving the young men and women of Athens given as sacrifices to the monster.[4] Images of the labyrinth often appear on the floors of baths in North Africa, including the late third- or fourth-century Baths of the Labyrinth

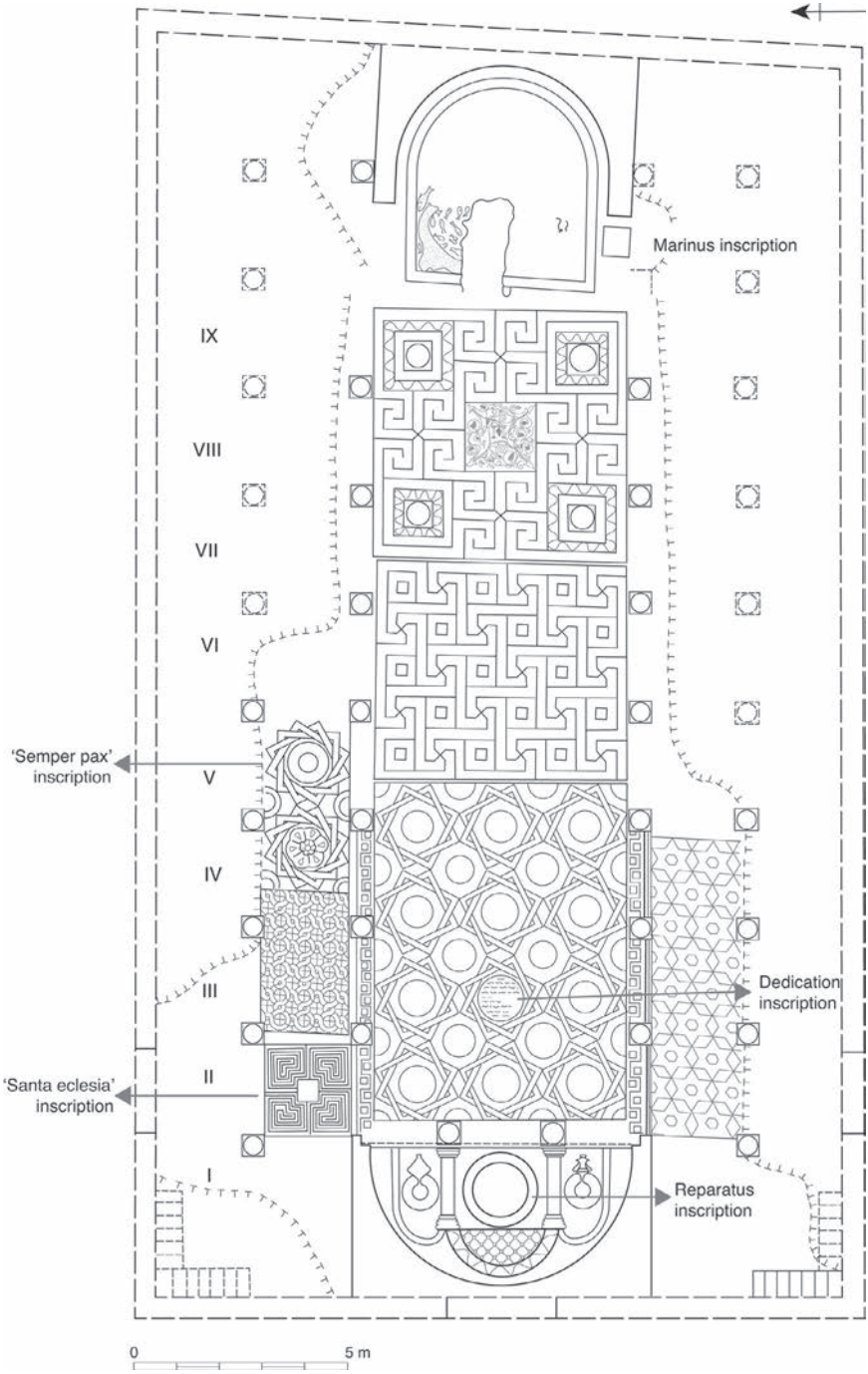

Figure 3.1 Plan, Basilica of Reparatus, Chlef, Algeria, late fifth century

Source: Plan by Alison Wilkins, after plan by M.-P. Reynaud, in Caillet 1987, 137 fig. 3

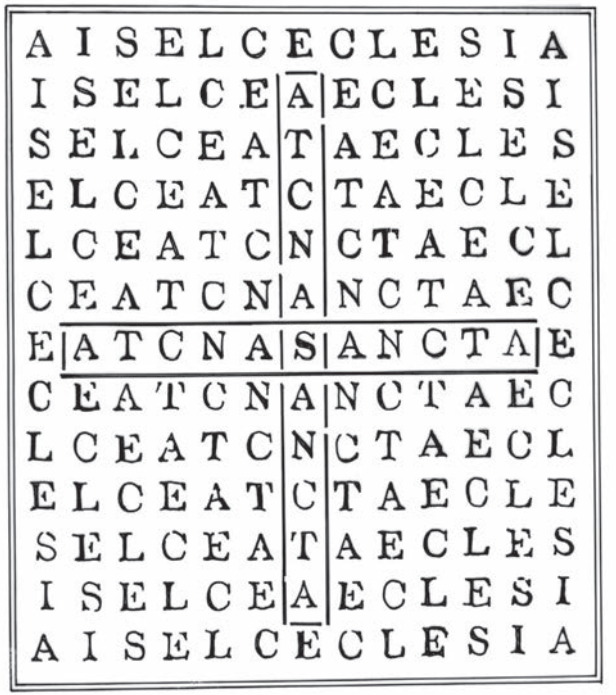
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Figure 3.2 "Holy Church" inscription (within labyrinth mosaic), entrance pavement, Basilica of Reparatus, Chlef, Algeria

Source: Drawing by Yvonne Beadnell

at Thuburbo Maius, a Roman city in northeastern Tunisia, in which a labyrinth mosaic with a similar format to that at Chlef frames a scene of the final triumph of Theseus over the Minotaur, as he leaps onto the back of the beast and prepares to cut off its head (Figure 3.3).[5]

As visitors to the church followed the winding line from the entrance into the labyrinth, they would have been reminded of the thread that Ariadne gave to Theseus to allow him to mark his path into the labyrinth so that he could later find his way back out, a reminder that the story was still known and commented upon, as well as illustrated, in late antiquity.[6] But as the viewer at Chlef followed one of the "correct" paths to the center of the labyrinth, (s)he found not Theseus and the Minotaur, but a thirteen-line Latin text that at first might have seemed to make little sense.[7] A reader cannot start this inscription at the "beginning": when read from left to right, the first letters of the first line form no recognizable words: "A-I-S-E-L-C . . .". Once one gets to the seventh letter of the first line, however, a word is discernable (if misspelled): "CHURCH" (*ECLESIA*). The arrangement of this word, and the arrangement of the same word on the second line below, offset

Figure 3.3 Detail, labyrinth pavement mosaic, Baths of the Labyrinth, Thuburbo Maius, Tunisia, third or fourth century, now in the Bardo Museum, Tunis

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

by one letter, would have provided a hint to the experienced reader that this is in fact a kind of puzzle, a "magic square."[8] Once they reached the exact center of the square, readers could "choose their own adventure,"[9] forming the two-word text of the inscription in a number of ways, starting with the central letter "S" in the middle of the seventh line: "HOLY CHURCH" (*SANCTA ECLESIA*). At Chlef, the "magic square," a format used in the Graeco-Roman period to turn texts into visual objects, has been converted to transmit a Christian message, marking the space of transition from the secular world to the Christian interior. Written forwards and backwards, up and down, the word *SANCTA* not only started the viewer

on their journey to "solve" the inscription, but also formed the intersecting vertical and horizontal lines of a cross, creating a neat connection between the significance of the word and its appearance.

The panel combines two classical puzzles – the labyrinth and the "magic square" – that challenge the reader, and that present yet another meaning when viewed in conjunction: at the center of the labyrinth is a (verbal-visual) cross, echoing the link between Christ and the labyrinth made by the fourth-century theologian Gregory of Nyssa: "the labyrinth of our life cannot be threaded by human capability alone. One must follow the same path as Christ who, though once in it (life), yet triumphed over its difficulties."[10] Like most Roman labyrinths, that at Chlef was too small to be walked in any precise way, unlike the labyrinths found on the floors of churches in medieval Europe; but it served a similar function, setting the reader up for a (short) journey of contemplation, leading to the "solution" of the puzzle, the salvation made possible by Christ and His sacrifice, which visitors would celebrate through their participation in the Eucharistic rite inside the church.[11]

After completing the labyrinth, visitors could have moved further into the north aisle, or into the nave. If their path took them down the aisle, they have would encountered a short text written into the middle of the aisle, made up of two words stretched over three lines: "Peace always" (*Sem/per/ pax*) (Figure 3.4).[12] Placed inside a meander frame, which is placed inside a twelve-pointed star made up of interlocking squares, the phrase presents a slogan popular in the internecine Donatist and Arian conflicts of the fifth century, wishing "peace" upon the congregation and the region.[13] As visitors walked into the nave of the church from the west, they encountered a rich series of complicated geometric mosaics, the first of which appears framed by a double circle within an eight-pointed star or octagon, one of a number of intersecting stars and circular forms that make up the westernmost panel of the nave pavement (Figure 3.5). The Latin inscription is fragmentary, but it is clear that the text is a dedication, giving the date that the basilica was founded (*eius basilicae fundamenta posita sunt*, the date "the foundations of this basilica were placed," in the year 324), asking the reader to "keep in mind" (*in mente habeas*) the donor of the mosaic (the "servant of God," *servum Dei*, whose name does not survive), and wishing a final blessing on the reader: "may you live in God."[14]

As Ann Marie Yasin has pointed out, the mosaic panel and its inscription appear to have been made late in the fifth century, around one hundred and fifty years after the purported foundation date of the church, forging a "historical link between the viewer's present and the early history of the site."[15] Not only does the text present a strong claim in favor of the church's antiquity, it is also framed within forms that may have inflected readers' interpretations of the text: first, within a concentric circle or shield-type (*clipeus*) frame, a form that was used to present texts related to important citizens (and to which we will return); and second, inside an eight-pointed star whose border is decorated with interlace patterns, an apotropaic form whose protective qualities were perhaps meant to echo the benediction with which the dedicatory inscription concludes.[16] Protected by their similar apotropaic frames, when activated by readers, the inscriptions in the aisle and nave wished peace and blessings upon the space.

Figure 3.4 "Peace always" inscription, Basilica of Reparatus, Chlef, Algeria
Source: Drawing by Yvonne Beadnell

After engaging with the aisle and nave inscriptions, members of the community could encounter two other texts written into the floor mosaic. The priests of Chlef, allowed onto the raised platform of the eastern apse, were more likely to be familiar with an inscription in a square panel that abuts the south side of the apse pavement, celebrating a deceased priest, Marinus, who may have been buried in a large crypt beneath the apse.[17] The content of the inscription is quite straightforward, naming the honorand and giving his title: "Marinus, priest" (*Marinus sacerdos*).[18] However, the text extends to fifteen lines, providing another "magic square" for readers to puzzle out in order to "read" the two-word core of the text, which emerges only from the center of the square, where the "M" of "Marinus" finally appears. Like the "HOLY CHURCH" (*SANCTA ECLESIA*) inscription in the labyrinth at the entrance to the basilica, this inscription encourages an active mode of reading and viewing, perhaps (because of its location) targeted at clergymen who could use the winding arrangement of the name and title of the priest – the founder of the church? – to reflect upon his life and deeds.

Figure 3.5 Dedication inscription, Basilica of Reparatus, Chlef

Source: After Vidal 1936, fig. 36

As the Marinus inscription is isolated at the eastern end of the church, near the apse, laypersons were more likely to be familiar with the large inscription of the bishop Reparatus, placed in the apsidal chapel at the western end of the building (Figure 3.6). At the end of their visit, or if they came to pay honor to Reparatus, at the very beginning, they would enter the western apse, reading the large inscription in the center, framed by a wreath which is itself framed in the mosaic by a columnar structure with a triple-arched opening, appearing to support a brick semi-dome above.[19] The wreath is bound together with flowering vines acting as fillets (ribbons), and these wend their way around the wreath, providing places for birds to perch. The text inside the wreath is a detailed epitaph for Reparatus, which provides the date on which the bishop passed away: "Here rests our father of holy memory, Reparatus the bishop, who served as priest for nine years and eleven months and went ahead of us in peace on the eleventh day before the Kalends of August (around July 22) in the 436th year of the province."[20] By presenting the epitaph of Reparatus in such a monumental architectural format, the mosaicists emphasized the architectural character of the space as a funerary chapel for the bishop, mimicking the actual three-dimensional arrangement of the space in two dimensions on the floor, a dimensional play often engaged in by mosaicists in

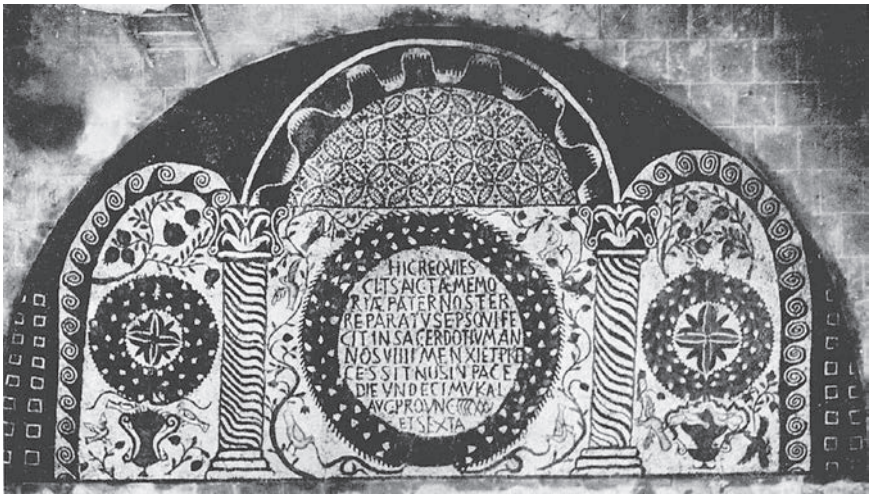

Figure 3.6 Reparatus inscription, Basilica of Reparatus, Chlef

Source: After Vidal 1936, fig. 38

the Roman period. Within this architectural frame, the wreath surrounding the text also elevates the bishop "of holy memory," crowning his name in a manner that signified victory in the Graeco-Roman world and, for Christians, evoked the wreath-crown earned by the martyrs, associations to which we will return later in this chapter. Reparatus may not have been a martyr or a saint, despite the reference to his "holy memory," but as Robin Jensen points out, the community may have considered him to be one, a perception enhanced by the presence of the large wreath frame, which may have also signaled the funerary character of the text.[21] Like the framed texts in the nave and the aisles of the church, the forms that frame the epitaph/dedication in Reparatus's chapel appear designed to shape the interpretation of the inscription, emphasizing the holy character of the modified space and the prominence of the bishop to whom it was dedicated.

This chapter examines the frames of inscriptions, such as those at Chlef basilica, which not only act on the words of their texts – to make texts easier to read – but that also convey extra-verbal messages of their own, in the process framing viewers' experiences within buildings. As we move through three case studies of some of the more popular as well as the unusual text-frames that appear in late antique sacred buildings, these extra-verbal (visual) powers of the frame become clear in sometimes surprising ways. First, we turn to the *tabula ansata* ("tablet with handles"), one of the most common frames for texts in the period. This particular frame had a long classical history as a frame for inscriptions, and in its different late antique incarnations the form allowed patrons to adopt and adapt the ancient visual language of the Roman elite to lend an aura of classical self-promotion to

their Christian expressions of dedication. However, the frame did more than evoke the Roman past. By taking what had been a three-dimensional, often sculptural, frame and "pasting" it into the two-dimensional medium of mosaic, mosaicists were able to play with the frame as a sign or "logo" for text and textuality. Exploring the tension between the function of the tabular form as a frame for text and as an independent image, this chapter reveals the subtle and complex ways in which Christian, Jewish, and Muslim patrons and artists adapted the classical frame and used it as a site of interaction at which viewers could contemplate the dedicatory acts of patrons, the significances of different parts of the building interior, and the materiality and dimensionality of the floor on which they were standing. Second, we examine the medallion or roundel frame, a form that also had a rich Roman history as a surround for texts *and* images. By forcing viewers to read and view in a circle, these frames quite literally shaped audiences' experiences of texts, at times evoking the classical *clipeus* frame used to support portraits of distinguished individuals, and at other times calling to mind the victory wreath-crown, which for Christians conjured up the presence of the martyrs, who earned their crowns through their violent deaths. Finally, this chapter investigates a rarer type of frame, what will be referred to here as the "object" frame, text-frames that take the shapes of real objects that would have been familiar to their viewers, including vessels, crosses, and architectural façades. These forms, while rare, were chosen to add specific shades of religious, cultural, and political meanings to the inscriptions framed within, augmenting the verbal messages of the texts while simultaneously making text legible as image and, sometimes, as a specific logo for individuals or beliefs. By playing with the boundaries of verbal and visual perception, the forms of *tabulae ansatae* and object frames tapped into deep wells of meaning, while the ways in which they were used and viewed reveals an enhanced interest in surfaces, materials, and logos in the late antique period.

Framing the late antique frame

The complex visual formats of the inscriptions in the Chlef basilica played an important role in encouraging viewers to classify them as different types of documents – as dedications, epitaphs, or emblematic or doctrinal statements disguised as puzzles – influencing their interpretations of the texts, as well as turning the framed texts into meaningful forms in their own right.[22] These frames were (and are) active participants in contextualizing and drawing attention to their contents while generating meanings of their own. One of the more powerful accounts of the active powers of the frame remains that of Jacques Derrida, who challenged the argument, advanced by Immanuel Kant, that frames were mere ornamental supplements (*parerga*) to the works of art that they surrounded.[23] Because of this essential, unbreakable partnership between frame and image, the frame is by its very nature a form on which it is difficult to focus, sometimes standing out from the work but at other times merging into the background.[24]

Even before Derrida published his examination of the *parergon*, the medievalist Meyer Schapiro had taken on the place of the frame in the history of forms.

In an essay published in 1969, Schapiro argued that the existence and function of the frame is historically determined rather than "natural."[25] As a result, artists of different periods were able to experiment with it as a form. As Schapiro writes,

> The form [of the frame] can be used to produce quite opposite effects, which also satisfy some need or concept. All these types [of frames] are intelligible as devices of ordering and expression, but no one of them is necessary or universal.[26]

While their approaches were quite different, Schapiro and Derrida both made clear the function of the frame to include and to exclude, creating a distinct space for the picture to act as a picture, to construct itself as "an illusion rather than a reality."[27] Art historians have continued to apply these approaches to frames of different periods and mediums,[28] and a number of scholars of Roman and late antique art have been fascinated by the frames of images in and on late antique mosaics, ivories, reliquaries, and jewelry.[29] However, the frames of inscriptions have suffered from an even greater lack of interest than have the frames of images, a damaging oversight as the frames of these texts were originally constructed as *parts* of their texts, in the same media, and ancient viewers and readers were meant to see them as such.[30] While they do not contain pictures, the frames of inscriptions worked in similar ways to the frames of images, isolating texts from surrounding figural or geometric panels while at the same time inviting viewers to focus on the visual *and* verbal features of the texts, and literally as well as figuratively shaping readings and meanings of texts as objects.

As inscriptions became more prominent within the interiors of sacred buildings in the period, and as these texts grew in length, their frames took on a greater visual importance.[31] The formats of late antique texts sometimes echo those of texts written onto the page, taking inspiration from manuscript tradition, but more often appear in layouts borrowed from the long-standing traditions of Roman epigraphy.[32] Many late antique building inscriptions were framed very simply, often by rectangles, squares, or circles, sometimes elaborated by decorative elements such as patterned geometric borders or natural elements such as vines.[33] Simple frames served to isolate inscriptions from the often-complicated surrounding elements of the overall design of the pavement or wall, drawing attention to their texts as separate visual entities while incorporating framed texts into the larger decorative programs of apse, floor, or wall mosaics. Inscriptions in different spaces could be connected through similar frames and formats.[34] Geometric frames could also physically link inscriptions, associating texts meant to be read together, as in the late sixth-century Crypt of St. Elianus, underneath the Church of the Prophet Elias at Madaba in modern-day Jordan, where the dedicatory inscription in the mosaic pavement is distributed among four interconnected octagonal frames (Figure 3.7).[35] In the case of the Elianus inscription, this framing strategy separates the text from the intricate surrounding geometric designs, making the words easier to digest in pieces, but harder to read as a whole. Other frames possessed magical or apotropaic valences, such as texts framed within eight-pointed

Figure 3.7 Mosaic inscriptions, pavement of the Crypt of St. Elianus, Madaba, late sixth century

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

stars, the so-called "seal of Solomon," seen in the Church of the Virgin, also in Madaba.[36] Some texts spill out of their frames, as does the apse mosaic inscription in the sixth-century church built by Justinian on Mount Sinai, where the lower portion of the text, which reports the names of additional donors as well as the date, has been squeezed out of the main body of the inscription and appears below in smaller lettering.[37] Certain inscriptions were not framed at all, but appear alone or associated with images (discussed in Chapter 5).

While no frame was ever an empty container for a text (or an image), certain ones seem to have been more powerful forms than others for ancient viewers. Unfortunately, ancient texts do not tell us anything about the frames of inscriptions.[38] Even our names for these frames are, for the most part, modern ones. As a result, any examination of the frames must be based upon the patterns that emerge from the surviving material evidence. Many types of inscription frames

were conventional and maintained fairly consistent ranges of use from the Roman period through at least the early seventh century CE. These more-or-less stable frames retained their classical associations with monumentality and public-ness, even when imported into another medium, most often from stone to mosaic. However, though there was a certain amount of consistency within traditional Roman frame types, artists in the fourth century began to experiment more freely with the formats of texts in buildings, playing with different frames and modes of framing. Instead of the rigidly confined texts of Roman public buildings and monuments, other formats began to dominate, indicating a loosening of the strict workshop system that produced carved texts in the Roman period and, more importantly, changing ideas about the appearances that texts should and could have.[39] Within this climate of relative freedom, artists framed their texts in ways that tell us something of the ways that viewers read inscriptions, but also make clear that texts in buildings were never just words.

Framing texts in the Roman world: the *tabula ansata*

Roman inscriptions often took relatively simple rectangular formats, their regular geometric frames boxing in texts and separating them from their surrounds. On buildings, monuments, altars, statue bases, and sarcophagi, texts frequently appeared within rectangles oriented either vertically, replicating the traditional format of the wooden writing tablet covered with wax (*tabula cera*), or horizontally. The latter format is visible on monuments such as the Arch of Constantine in Rome, whose dedication was written in the gilded bronze letters (*litterae aureae*) placed inside rectangular tablets displayed lengthwise on each side of the monument directly over the central bay.[40] The relatively long lines of the inscription make the text easy to read, and the rectangular frame simultaneously contains the text, separating it from the surrounding reliefs, and presents it to the viewer. While these rectangular formats seem to have been *de facto* for many types of public inscriptions, conveying a special kind of permanence and monumentality, we should remember that other formats were available to patrons, artists, and inscription carvers. Even though these frames were simple text-boxes, they also served as sites of communication between text and audience, a similar function played by the frames of late antique images, at which viewers could see, pray to (or through), and sometimes even touch, holy figures.[41]

Similarly isolating and inviting frames were often used to frame the dedication inscriptions of late antique buildings. One such monumental inscription survives from the pavement of the sixth-century Church of Ss. Peter and Paul at Gerasa (modern Jerash) in Jordan, the mosaic with which we began the book **(see Color Plate 1)**. The panel now hangs, freshly conserved, on the wall of the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, a display strategy that re-frames the partial floor of a building as a picture, converting a functional piece of flooring into an *objet d'art*.[42] Strikingly, one's visit to the church in Jerash today, half a world away, is framed by rather a different impression than of the nicely cleaned mosaic-as-aesthetic object: weeds grow in the ruins of the building, while scattered tesserae that have broken

away from the remnants of the pavement lie all around the site (see Figure 1.1). The epigram of the mosaic, written in white onto a bright red *tabula ansata* (literally a "tablet with handles") originally placed on the floor in front of the apse of the church, proclaims the "beautiful wonders" brought to the people of the city by its bishops, of which the church building, built and adorned by the Bishop Anastasios, is "decorated with silver and colored stones" of mosaic.[43] The red ground of the frame adopts a visual strategy demanding attention: one actually notices the form and color of the frame before reading the text inside.

While integrated into the larger program of the floor, the color and placement of the tablet encourages viewers to read the frame as if it were glued down on top of the white background, playing with the two-dimensional nature of the medium of mosaic.[44] The *tabula ansata* is installed above a lineup of Egyptian cities, including Alexandria (with its lighthouse, the *Pharos*) and Memphis, simultaneously framing the text and disrupting (or supplementing) the imagined three-dimensional space in which the cities appear. The frame's red ground propels the white text forward to the eyes of the readers, making it easier to read but also turning framed text itself into an aesthetic object, a kind of monumental panel that impressively hangs above cities depicted. Due to its rich color and large size, the frame would have drawn viewers towards it, shaping their experience of movement within the building while also acting to frame the most sacred space of the church, the sanctuary, marking it off from the nave.[45] By presenting a specific vision of the creation of the building, one from which the patron of the church, Anastasios, emerges as the heroic figure, the framed text also frames the erudite viewer's experience of the building, forever linking the patron to the apostles Peter and Paul.[46] Because of its visual properties, the enclosed text was able to communicate with literate, semi-literate, and illiterate viewers.

But where did this *tabula ansata* (henceforth *tabula*) form come from? And how did late antique artists and viewers see and interpret the form? We must investigate the Greek birth and Roman development of the form in order to understand what late antique mosaic *tabulae* shared with their classical predecessors, and what new features were developed by artists in response to changes in taste (i.e. the increasing popularity of mosaic) and religious context. While we do not know what the Greeks and Romans called this form, or if it had a name in antiquity, the *tabula* appears to have originated in Greece or Asia Minor in the Archaic period to satisfy a specific functional requirement of inscribed texts, typically votive dedications to the gods meant to be hung up and displayed in public.[47] By the late seventh or early sixth century BCE, dedicants had begun to hang votive *tabulae* made of wood and bronze inside temples, their handles (*ansae*) allowing the plaques to be fixed to a column or temple wall without damaging the inscription inside the main body of the frame.[48] While very few of these plaques survive, the forms of the earliest examples reveal that the handles of the frame started out as circular rather than triangular shapes.[49]

While it remains impossible to reconstruct fully the first few centuries of its life, the *tabula* was a form in motion between mediums quite soon after its invention. By the classical period, Greek stonecutters were using it on stone monuments,

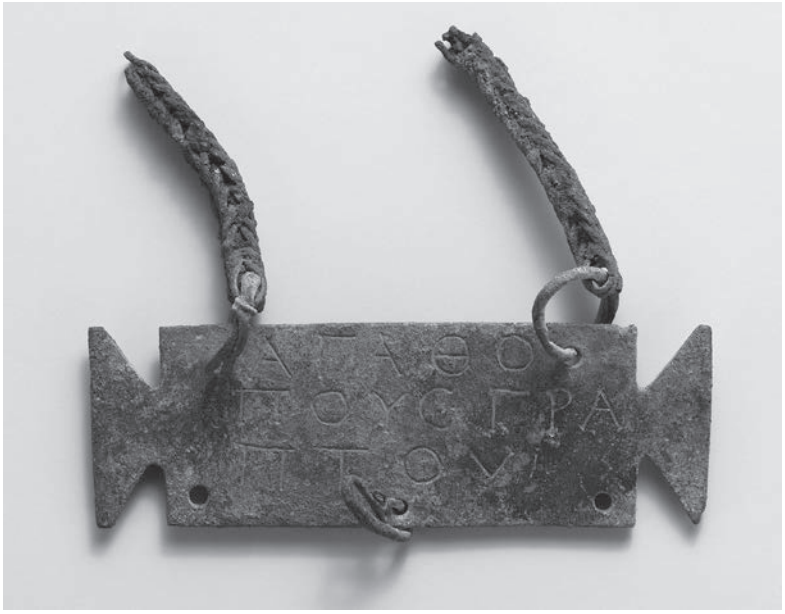

Figure 3.8 Bronze votive to Serapis in the form of a *tabula ansata*, second century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (MMA 21.88.172)

Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1921

including tombstones, to frame inscriptions that were funerary instead of votive in character.[50] But the *tabula* became truly popular only in the Roman period, by which point it had also undergone a formal transformation, its circular handles transformed into triangular ones.[51] The Romans used this more angular *tabula* to frame votive dedications to the gods, especially in metal; but by the second century, the *ansae* of these frames were no longer used as points of attachment. Instead, dedicants used new secondary *ansae* attached to the top and bottom of the tablet,[52] metal pegs projecting from the back of the frame,[53] or drilled through the main body of the tablet to attach it to the temple wall, as is visible in a second-century bronze *tabula* dedicated to the god Serapis, where five holes were drilled into the tablet to enable the insertion of bronze chains that would anchor the frame to the wall (Figure 3.8).[54]

At the same time that the handles of *tabulae* lost their practical function, the frames were also put to other uses by Roman artists, including for texts related to Roman military victories. Such a use is depicted on the "Spoils from the Temple" relief on the inner bay of the Arch of Titus in Rome, set up c. 81 CE to celebrate the suppression of the Jewish Revolt and the sacking of the Jerusalem Temple eleven years earlier, where attendants carry *tabula*-shaped placards (Figure 3.9).[55]

Figure 3.9 "Spoils from the Jerusalem Temple" relief with men carrying blank *tabulae*, Arch of Titus, Rome, c. 81

Source: Photograph by author

While no original placards survive, because they were most likely made of wood, the texts that they bore would have advertised the specifics of the victory to the audience, naming the emperor and his titles, or perhaps labeling prominent captives or important military spoils (on the Arch, the menorah and showbread table from the Temple).[56]

In addition to its use for military signs or labels, the *tabula* was also a particularly popular frame for Roman dedicatory and funerary inscriptions, typically prominently sited on their monuments and meant for public consumption.[57] Giovanni Giacomo Pani, one of the few to examine the visual reception of the *tabula*, sees it as a frame for public inscriptions, including monumental building inscriptions such as that which designates a mid-third-century grainhouse at Ostia in Italy as the property of two freedmen (*liberti*) with Greek names: "Grainhouse of Epagathus and Epaphroditus," (*Horrea Epagathiana et Epaphroditiana*).[58] Standing out against the brick façade of the building, the white marble *tabula* proclaimed the name of the building, which included the names of its owners. This iconic frame became more popular in the second century, conveying visually the legal or quasi-legal contents of the texts it framed on the façades of buildings or funerary monuments.[59]

By the late Roman period, while the *tabula* frame was still used for votive dedications, it was also used to frame texts of different types in a range of media, including stone, metal, wood, and paint. The form was popular in Rome as well as

in the new capital of Constantinople,[60] and it also appealed to patrons in the provinces, who applied the *tabula* to sarcophagi as well as to architectural decoration.[61] *Tabulae* were on occasion used to frame inscriptions in languages other than Greek and Latin, including Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Aramaic, as in the dedicatory *tabula* on the exterior of the early second-century Tomb of Elahbel at Palmyra in Syria, tragically destroyed by the Islamic State in 2015, which featured a bilingual inscription in Greek and Palmyrene (Figure 3.10).[62] However, even in multilingual contexts in the eastern Mediterranean, the *tabula* was more often used to frame Greek or Latin inscriptions, testifying to the continuing strength of its classical visual heritage: for example, at the site of Dura Europos in Syria, a site where Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were all in active use in inscriptions, *tabulae* are used to frame texts in Latin, Greek, and Aramaic, suggesting its association in Durene life with Roman tradition (Figure 3.11).[63]

Because of its very ubiquity, the *tabula* is a frame that slips in and out of view, fading into the background even (and especially) when one tries to focus on it. However, while the form could frame different types of texts, it is clear that the frame was nearly always used to frame text rather than image.[64] For Roman viewers, the *form alone* seems to have been able to stand as a sign for "text," highlighting important, often official texts meant for public consumption.[65] These significances would have been noticed, even by viewers who could not read even one letter of the text within the frame.[66]

From the fourth century onwards, artists continued to use the *tabula* because of its power as an index for text. The link between the frame and its verbal contents was so strong that late antique artists occasionally used the form to frame the "original" Christian title plaque (from the Latin *titulus*, called a τίτλον in the Septuagint version of the Gospel of John 19:19), the sign on the top of the cross onto which the Romans had written Christ's name and faux title had been written at the time of His Crucifixion: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."[67] While representations of the Crucifixion are few and far between in late antique art, the fact that artists thought of that all-important "label" as a classical *tabula* makes clear the form's suggestive power as a sign.[68]

Tabulae from sculpture to mosaic

The function of the *tabula* as an index for text – strengthened visually by its two graphic triangular *ansae* – appears to have attracted mosaicists, who began using the form in the second century CE to frame their own signatures as well as short dedicatory inscriptions in floor mosaics.[69] Early examples of mosaic *tabulae* are still *in situ* in Ostia, in the commercial area near the theater known as the Square of the Corporations, where inscriptions on the floor label areas as booths for commercial groups from cities in North Africa, Sardinia, and Gaul (Figure 3.12).[70] These texts acted as billboards-on-the-floor for the companies and guilds that they advertised. Like the majority of these early examples of *tabulae*, the Ostia frames are integrated into the surrounding mosaic pavements through color: the frames are outlined in black, and their texts are written in black on white grounds made

Figure 3.10 Detail, *tabula*-framed inscription, Tower Tomb of Elahbel, Palmyra, early second century, destroyed by the Islamic State in 2015

Source: Andrew Wilson/Manar al-Athar

Figure 3.11 *Tabula*-framed wall inscription, paint on plaster, Dura Europos, Yale-French excavations at Dura Europos, Yale University Art Gallery, 1935.95

Source: Photograph © Yale University Art Gallery

Figure 3.12 Mosaic inscription advertising the services of ship caulkers and rope makers, pavement of the Square of the Corporations, Ostia, second century

Source: Photograph by author

of the same tesserae as the surrounding ground of the pavement, creating a flat and graphic two-dimensional effect.

Late antique mosaicists frequently used the same "integrated" *tabula* form to frame the dedication inscriptions of churches and synagogues. While it remains difficult to calculate the precise percentage of dedicatory inscriptions framed by *tabulae*, the majority of extant mosaic *tabulae* frame dedicatory inscriptions, including texts placed in Christian, Jewish, and secular spaces.[71] Patrons and artists appear to have considered the form a particularly appropriate frame for statements of dedication, including votive dedication (as we will see shortly), though it could also frame other sorts of texts. As a dedicatory frame, the *tabula* seems to have had a special power to encourage readers of the inscriptions within to praise, pray for, and remember the patrons of sacred buildings (who were often also the local priests), as did the framed dedication inscription in the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius at Khirbet Mukhayyat in modern-day Jordan, dated to 557/558 **(Color Plate 20)**.[72] In the church, the frame contains an inscription that identifies the patrons of the church as well as the patron saints, using standard formulae to ask the saints to accept the offerings of the donors for their salvation (ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας) and for the repose (ὑπὲρ ἀναπαύσεως) of a deceased donor, John.[73] While the frame is beautifully rendered, the border articulated with red, yellow, and black lines of tesserae and the handles decorated with petal-like shapes, and the serif script is quite decorative in its own right, the *tabula* is connected to the frame (actually multiple frames) of the main nave panel, and has been stretched out along the whole width of the nave. The off-white limestone ground of the Khirbet Mukhayyat *tabula* merges with the ground of the surrounding pavement, privileging the words of the text over dramatic visual impact.

The Mukhayyat *tabula* might be placed in the same genre as the *tabula* from the Church of Ss. Peter and Paul at Gerasa in terms of its function as a general sign for official texts, as well as its specific verbal content (a dedication inscription) and spatial context (between nave and sanctuary). However, the visual effects of the two frames are quite different.[74] While the Mukhayyat frame fades into the background, allowing the text to speak more loudly than its frame, the Gerasa frame demands attention as an independent form in its own right. The aesthetic discrepancies between the two are useful for us to think with, as they reveal patrons and artists using one frame in two distinct ways. The majority of the more than three hundred extant mosaic *tabulae* operate in the same "integrated" mode as does the Khirbet Mukhayyat frame, revealing the two-dimensional nature of the medium of mosaic that encouraged artists to think in terms of integrated panels, a development that went hand-in-hand with the loss of interest in the illusionistic pictorial space of the *emblema* and the increasing popularity of the carpet style.[75]

The Gerasa pavement demonstrates an alternative approach to the frame that nods towards three-dimensionality, the red color of the frame creating the illusion that it is superimposed upon a separate background. While still relatively subtle in its imitation of a three-dimensional form, the red *tabula* harkens back to the *emblema* tradition. In earlier centuries, Greek and Roman mosaicists had

Figure 3.13 Mosaic signature of Hephaistion, pavement of a palace at Pergamon, mid-second century BCE

Source: bpk Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY

used even more dramatic *trompe l'oeil* devices to frame inscriptions, as in the floor mosaics of a second-century BCE palace at Pergamon, into which the artist Hephaistion envisioned his name written onto a piece of parchment that has come loose from its wax so that the lower right-hand corner of the sheet appears to peel away from the surface of the pavement (Figure 3.13).[76] By forcing viewers to question the reality and materiality of the image, the mosaic made material an age-old tension, or even competition, between art and nature.[77] Almost forcing viewers to bend down to fold the "parchment" back into place, Hephaistion breaks open the two-dimensional surface of the mosaic while simultaneously demonstrating his own skill by creating a self-consciously artificial image too fabulously tactile to be real, entering his own lot – a work within a work, inscribed with his own name – into the competition between art (as imitation, *mimesis*) and nature.[78]

Late antique mosaicists took up this *trompe l'oeil* tradition and ran with it, playing with the cut-and-pasteability of the *tabula* frame in ways that signal the love of the fragment, a preference associated with the "jeweled style" of the period.[79] The artists who created the two *tabulae*-framed dedicatory inscriptions from the fifth- or early sixth-century Vrina Plain Basilica at Butrint, in modern Albania, crafted the illusion that the frames are plaques superimposed over the ground of

Figure 3.14 Detail, mosaic inscription, nave pavement of the Vrina Plain Basilica, Butrint, Albania, fifth or early sixth century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of John Mitchell

the rest of the nave pavement (Figure 3.14).[80] Even more strikingly, these tabular frames present votive inscriptions, recording the fulfillment of a vow "of those whose names God knows."[81] At Butrint, the artists, presumably at the behest of the anonymous patrons of the church, not only preserved the spatial properties of the classical *tabula*, envisioning the frame as a sculptural element operating in three dimensions instead of two, but also used the form to frame the same type of content as had its inventors more than one thousand years previously, revealing a remarkable continuity of votive practice.

Even more playful than the Butrint frame is the frame of the dedicatory inscription in the early fifth-century Thyrsos Basilica at Tegea in Greece, placed on the floor immediately inside the entrance to the church (see Figure 2.7).[82] As soon as a congregant or clergyman walked into the space, (s)he would see the framed text that gives the impression that it is being carried by two curly haired *putti* wearing floral crowns and clad in tunics. By the period, the iconography of a *tabula* or other rectangular inscription frame borne by two *putti* or winged victories was many centuries old, found quite often on Roman and late antique sarcophagi.[83] At Tegea, this classicizing visual format is used to present not an epitaph, but a dedication inscription that praises the donor, the priest Thyrsos, for his construction

and decoration of the church.[84] The inscription acts as a kind of frontispiece to the building, the architectural equivalent to a very similar *tabula* carried by two nude winged *putti* on the title page of the Codex-Calendar of 354, a compilation of pagan and Christian calendars, as well as lists (of the urban prefects of Rome, the regions of the city, etc.) produced for the nobleman Valentinus by one of the more famous scribes and script creators of the day, Furius Dionysius Filocalus (Figure 3.15).[85] As in the manuscript, where the *tabula* contains the patron's dedication, the text at Tegea frames the viewer's experience of the building as soon as (s)he walks into the interior, acting as a "witness" to the grandeur of the building and, by extension, the largesse and erudition of the patron.[86] At Tegea, even more significant is the illusion of superimposition created by the inclusion of the two frame-bearers, who (though not particularly realistically modeled) appear to bend their knees to lean in to support the imagined weight of the *tabula*, replicating the visual effect which a *tabula* would have had when depicted as borne by two figures carved in stone. While the text-plaque and its bearers are both two dimensional, the epigraphic presentation of the frames here – including the frame created around the *tabula* by the bodies of the *putti*, who stand upon the black frame of the nave carpet – forces the viewer to contemplate the nature of the surface on which (s)he stands, attracting attention but also constructing the text-frame (and its figural attendants) as a monumental architectural image.[87]

The appearance of the two handles (*ansae*) of the Tegea *tabula* emphasizes this architectural effect even further. Unlike those of the Butrint and Gerasa frames, which are decorated with the popular motif of ivy leaves, the handles of the Tegea frame feature round holes that harken back to the original form of the *tabula* as a wood or metal plaque meant to be attached to the building interior, rather than a static two-dimensional form. These *trompe l'oeil* holes are quite rare as a decorative motif, but this and other extant examples of the motif demonstrate that late antique artists were familiar with the ancient appearance of the form as a separate panel.[88] At Tegea, the frame simultaneously challenges and reinforces the two-dimensional surface of the pavement, and in the process breaks down the barrier between viewer and pavement, playing on the material differences between sculpture (from which this form comes) and mosaic in order to elide the realms of text and image. The text at Tegea has become a work of art, and the classical *tabula* has been transformed into a frame for Christian statements of donation, though the artists preserved as well as played with the aesthetics of the original votive tablet. For viewers in the church, the inscription with its frame was a site of interaction with surfaces as well as deeper material, cultural, and religious significances.

Tabular readings and viewings

To the late antique viewer, the *tabula* signaled the presence of a verbal text, most often a dedication to God, Christ, or the saints, acting as a frame for the viewer's experience of the built interior. By integrating the form into the mosaic pavements of churches in different ways, artists and patrons were able to isolate inscriptions

Figure 3.15 Frontispiece, Codex-Calendar of 354, produced in Rome, seventeenth century, Vatican Library (Cod. Barberini lat. 2154, R1), Vatican City

Source: Photograph © Vatican Library

from images, or alternatively to turn inscriptions into images that made viewers question the materiality of the medium of mosaic, breaking the surface of the floor or wall in order to encourage viewers to interact with texts. Perhaps even more significantly, the Gerasa, Butrint, and Tegea *tabulae* speak to the long-lived power of the classical visual language of pagan dedication in late antiquity, whose forms continued to be used to frame statements of Christian donation.

Although these frames play with the aesthetic qualities of the original votive *tabula*, they demonstrate a certain amount of continuity with the classical Roman forms of the frame. Other versions of the tabular frame make clear the increasingly decorative value of the form in late antiquity, as mosaicists and painters experimented with the playfulness of their media to stretch the form across curved spaces or to turn the form into ever more abstract schemes. For example, in San Paolo fuori le mura in Rome, part of the dedicatory inscription splits to fit into two half-*tabulae* that curve around the bottom of the triumphal arch of the church (Figure 3.16). Set up in the mid-fifth century by Pope Leo I to celebrate the patron Galla Placidia, daughter of the emperor Theodosius, the curving text accentuates the shape of its architectural support, its unusual split appearance attracting the eye of the viewer.[89]

Similar formal experimentation is evident in floor mosaics from the eastern half of the empire, revealing a common interest in pushing the tabular form to its limits.

Figure 3.16 Detail, left side (beginning) of curving *tabula*-framed dedication, mosaic of the triumphal arch of San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome, mid-fifth century

Source: Photograph by author

Figure 3.17 Dedication inscriptions in Hebrew and Greek, entrance pavement, synagogue at Beth Alpha, Israel, sixth century

Source: Judith McKenzie/Manar al-Athar

Two connected *tabulae* in the sixth-century synagogue of Beth Alpha, not far from Beth Shean, reveal an increasing move towards abstraction, showing artists outside of major urban settings adopting and adapting the formal language of the frame (Figure 3.17).[90] Placed at the entrance of the synagogue and framed by two guardian lions, these two texts – the first, longer text in Hebrew, the second in Greek – are both dedication inscriptions, demonstrating that even mosaicists working outside of the cities were aware of the link between the *tabula* form and its dedicatory content. In the synagogue, the more prominent inscription is written in the spoken language of the community, Hebrew, rather than in Greek, and contains information about the

construction of the building, including the date and the cost, while the Greek text is a prayer on behalf of the mosaicists, Marianos and his son, Hanina.[91] However, while these frames are *tabulae*, their forms are slightly off in ways that hint at changes in the way the frame was understood by certain artists or patrons. The larger tablet is itself framed by a thin rectangle, calling into question the efficacy of the *tabula* as a frame for text – if the *tabula* was such a powerful sign, why does the text need a second frame? In the *ansae*, the round "holes" of the Tegea frame have become triangles, a decorative motif that better complements the forms of the tablet's handles but that also represents a move away from the classical version of the frame. The smaller *tabula* is perhaps even more formally interesting, as the tiny red triangles barely connected to the sides of the rectangle seem to be vestigial remnants of the more functional-looking handles of other *tabulae*.

This same move towards separation and abstraction is evident in Christian contexts as well, as in two *tabulae* in the fifth-century church at Hir esh-Sheikh in Syria, now in the Maʿarat al-Nuʿman Museum **(Color Plate 21)**.[92] Originally part of the western border of the nave pavement, near the entrance to the church, the texts' frames are recognizable versions of the tabular form, with triangular red "holes" punched into their handles. However, their sign value is lessened by their meta-frames, the diamonds and rectangles that surround them, as well as by the presence of a second pair of red triangles – a kind of floating, detached *ansae* – that offset the visual punch of the handles. Although they still read as text-frames, the *tabulae* are reduced to being one frame among multiple frames, and are in danger of becoming mere decoration. While these are only several of the many tabular frames that survive from the period, the Beth Alpha and Hir esh-Sheikh *tabulae* complicate our picture of the form as an assertive and meaningful frame for text. Like the tablet at Tegea elevated by two *putti*, they demonstrate mosaicists at play, challenging more traditional uses of the frame.

These versions of the frame may make us doubt the value of the *tabula* as sign, but other variants clarify the appreciation of certain patrons for the form as a kind of logo for persons or affiliations. Appearing first in the sixth century in the context of imperial architectural projects associated with the emperor Justinian, a new sculptural version of the *tabula* pairs the frame with the cross, that ever-resonant symbol of Christ's sacrifice for the sake of mankind. We have already seen the use of the *tabula* as a frame for the sign over Christ's head in images of the crucifixion, an iconography that can be traced back at least to the sixth century. Around the same time, this format, the *tabula* on top of the cross, breaks free of its narrative confines and becomes an independent symbol that is associated with imperial projects in Palestine. In Bethlehem, this new frame pops up on the octagonal baptismal font of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, where it contains an inscription that invokes the memory of deceased donors to the church "whose names God knows."[93] The same form is used to frame a massive stucco inscription from the cisterns of the monumental New Church (*Nea Ekklesia*) in Jerusalem that records the emperor's construction of the building, meant to rival the Holy Sepulchre itself.[94] Strikingly, the bitter Roman text on Christ's tablet ("Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews") has been expunged and replaced by statements of Christian dedication and prayer. At

the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, another Justinianic architectural project, the sign appears a third time *sans* text, carved on the exterior walls of the monastery, acting simultaneously as a Christian and an imperial logo that brands the building as a house of God, Christ, and emperor.[95] At Sinai, the frame has emptied its textual contents and taken center stage for itself.

The pairing of the *tabula* with the cross was clearly resonant for at least some artists in Palestine and Egypt, and not only for sculptors. In the sixth-century Church of St. Bacchus at Horvat Tinshemet, in Palestine, this form was adapted for the medium of mosaic.[96] However, as we have already seen, the process through which artists translated forms from one medium to another was not always simple, and this particular translation was no different: on the pavement of the northern aisle of the church, not far from the entrance, a *tabula* frames a large cross. Here, the *tabula* does not just present the cross, it has actually swallowed it. This inversion of the relationship between the two forms, as well as the presence of a visual symbol or image inside a form typically reserved for text alone, speaks to the tension between the frame and its contents.[97] While the cross possesses an iconic power as a sign, the antiquity and significance of the *tabula* ensured that the eyes of viewers would bounce back and forth between the frame and the cross. The competition between the frame and its contents produced and harnessed an intense visual energy to encourage viewers to contemplate the patrons of the church (the *tabula* as a sign for dedication) as well as the communal Christian character of the interior.

Painted *tabulae*

Mosaicists were not the only artists to play with the *tabula* to convey a range of classical and Christian meanings. Painters also employed the form to frame dedications and other texts. While the existence of late antique painted inscriptions framed by *tabulae* is perhaps unsurprising, since earlier Roman painters had used the form relatively commonly, the few that survive from late antique structures are precious survivals. However, a small handful of examples gives us at least a taste of their general character, indicating that painted programs often featured inscriptions presented in visually interesting ways.

In Chapter 2, we considered red inscriptions, especially in the extraordinary synagogue at Rehov, which are painted in bright red paint and framed by elaborate green wreaths. A less visually impressive, but still significant, red *tabula*-framed inscription survives from the Urn Tomb Church at the Nabataean city of Petra in southern Jordan. Converted from a tomb into a church in the fifth century, the monumental Urn Tomb acted as the first cathedral of the city before the construction of the so-called Petra Church on a neighboring ridge in the city.[98] Framed by a *tabula*, the dedicatory inscription of the church is painted in red onto the north side of the east wall of the structure, and records the consecration of the church (Figure 3.18):

> In the time of the most holy bishop Jason, by the grace of God, this place was consecrated [ἡγιάσθη ὁ τοπός] on the fifth of the month of Loos, the year 341,

Figure 3.18 Painted dedication, rear wall of the Urn Tomb Church, Petra, Jordan, 446
Source: Photograph by author

> the *numerus Tertiodalmatarum* being present, and Julianos the deacon . . . Christ, Savior.[99]

The inscription has fascinated historians because it provides information lacking from many of the other early Christian inscriptions in the city, including the name of the coordinating bishop of the city, Bishop Jason (who was buried in the church);[100] the groups who were "present" (παρόντος) at the consecration, most importantly a *numerus* (unit) of the Roman army, the unit *Tertiodalmatarum* (*III Dalmatae*, from the province of Dalmatia, in modern Croatia and Albania), and a deacon, Julianos; and the precise date of the conversion of the building, the fifth of the month of Loos (July 24) in the year 446 (341, according to the era of the province of Arabia). While the text is written clearly and its words correctly spelled, the hand is rough, and the bottom of the tabular field of the frame poorly drawn, a far cry from the nice finish of many of the mosaic texts we have examined in this chapter.

However, the rough visual character of the text is in fact one of its more interesting components: its appearance as a painted inscription, and the language that it uses, indicate that it was painted onto the wall immediately after the church was consecrated. Indeed, the specific formula used in the inscription to date the text

to a specific day, the fifth of the month of Loos (July 24), make it clear that the text was an integral part of the process through which the building was converted from tomb to temple. The red-painted inscription in the Urn Tomb is not only an epigraphic commemoration of an event, but was also an active part of producing the sacred space which it itself inhabits. Presuming the church continued in use after the Petra Church was built, the inscription would have been reread annually by worshippers at celebrations of the original consecration on July 24, also the date of the winter solstice, on which day the setting sun would have shone through the door of the Tomb and directly illuminated the northeast corner of the interior where the inscription was placed.[101] By using the *tabula* frame, the priest and the congregation endowed their rough, spontaneous-looking inscription with a kind of monumentality and permanence appropriate for the massive church interior, conveying a gravity to the newly converted pagan tomb.

The red *tabula*-framed inscription in the church at Petra is not the only one of its type in the region. Similar tabular frames surround inscriptions painted onto plaster grounds in the monastic complex on the neighboring mountain of Jebel Haroun, the site of a shrine sacred to Aaron, and were most likely part of the decoration of the wall of the second phase of the chapel around the end of the fifth or early sixth century, as well as a lengthy red-painted inscription in the south *pastophorion* (chamber next to the apse) of the main church dating to the mid-seventh or early eighth century.[102] Another similar red-painted inscription, of the text of Psalm 33 (34):6, survives on the exterior architrave of a door of the Church of the Aedicula at Umm al-Rasas in modern Jordan, probably dated to the eighth century.[103] By presenting their texts in *tabulae*, painters were able to monumentalize the texts of quotations from the Bible or of dedications. In Arabia, at least, the power of the (painted) *tabula* persisted into the period of Umayyad rule, and the form was used to present a large Arabic inscription on the end wall of the west aisle of the royal baths-*cum*-reception hall at Qusayr ʿAmra, also in Jordan. Written in brown letters with red borders below the scene of the caliph lounging and being attended to by his servants, in a *tabula* with a bright blue ground, the text was only recently made legible by recent restoration efforts, beginning with the *bismillah* ("In the name of God"), and probably recorded the foundation of the baths by the prince (later caliph) al-Walid **(Color Plate 22)**.[104] While it is impossible to read the last line of the text, its presentation within a colored *tabula* speaks to the Umayyad borrowing of Roman and late antique epigraphic forms, confirming the lasting power of this form of text-frame beyond its Christian and Jewish contexts.[105]

Framing in circles

Besides the *tabula ansata*, other geometric frames also had significances beyond their simple forms in the period. One of the more important of these frames was the circle, a simple shape that possessed a specific set of meanings in antiquity. We have already seen a number of "inscriptions-in-circles," texts that through their visual arrangements and verbal tropes ask viewers to read in the round either physically (walking in a circle) or conceptually (the circle as *kosmos*), or both.[106]

These circular inscriptions are more frequently found on walls, as in Anicia Juliana's church of Hagios Polyeuktos in Constantinople,[107] but are occasionally present in churches, where they encourage the viewer to walk around the circular text in order to read and, perhaps, to re-perform its verbal contents. The texts-in-circles that appear on the floors of churches in modern Jordan – at Gerasa (the Propylaea Church), Khirbat al-Samra (the church of St. John the Baptist), and Madaba (the Church of the Virgin) – often transmit prayers for the donors and the clerics of the church rather than perform elaborate ekphraseis of their interiors.[108] This circular format was not unique to the eastern Mediterranean, and we began this chapter with a similar inscription in a circular frame, from the church at Chlef in Algeria, the epitaph of Reparatus.

The formal sources for the layout of these round types of texts are different from those for texts arranged around circles: instead of ringing a circle, the inscriptions appear as a centered block of text shaped by the circles that frame them. These round frames appear to be connected conceptually with circular Roman frames for inscriptions, the most famous of which was the *clipeus virtutis*, a shield-shaped support in metal or stone on which the virtues of an honorand were inscribed.[109] This same form appears in monumental contexts as a frame for texts in the act of being written down: for example, on the Column of Trajan in Rome, an image of Victory appears midway up the historiated frieze, inscribing the military accomplishments of the emperor on a shield.[110]

In late antique interiors, this *clipeus* format was adapted to serve as a frame for a wider range of inscriptions that testified to the status and good character of the patron as well as more specifically Christian content.[111] While most scholarly publications refer to these types of frames as "roundels" or "medallions," the circular rimmed shape had cultural and symbolic connotations that these generic classifications ignore. In fact, mosaic roundels or medallions in many cases retained the sculptural quality of the *clipeus*, their borders causing the frames to seem as if they are superimposed upon pavements. A circular form of this type frames the dedicatory inscription in the pavement of the fourth-century south hall of the Complex of Bishop Theodore at Aquileia in northern Italy (Figure 3.19).[112] The form of the *clipeus* is defined by the border, composed of two concentric black lines, which gives the impression that the body of the epigraphic field, the "shield," projects outward from a thin recessed rim, pasted down upon the marine scene that decorates the pavement of the hall. The inscription framed by the "shield" describes the donations of the bishop Theodore: "Happy Theodore [*Theodore felix*], with the help of God Almighty and the flock given to you by Heaven, you have blessedly finished everything and gloriously dedicated [the pavement]."[113] The round frame gives the illusion that the text is pasted down onto the background, blurring the boundary between two and three dimensions. The text plays with the same trope of the "happy" patron ("Happy Theodore") as do earlier imperial inscriptions, including the *clipeus*-framed inscription that appears paired with an image of the emperor Tiberius on the top of an early first-century tin and gilded bronze sword scabbard found in Mainz in Germany, the text on which also emphasizes the excellence of the victorious emperor: "Happy Tiberius" (*Felic/itas/ Tibe/ri[us]*)

Figure 3.19 Inscription of Bishop Theodore with images of fishing and Noah and the *ketos*, pavement of the south hall, Complex of Bishop Theodore, Aquileia, fourth century

Source: Scala/Art Resource, NY

(Figure 3.20).[114] Centuries separate the scabbard from the Aquileia mosaic pavement, but the association between the *clipeus* frame and honorific texts and, in the case of the Aquileia inscription, dedications, continued to resonate strongly for late antique patrons, artists, and viewers.[115]

By playing with the borders of the round "shield" shape, artists, especially mosaicists, were able to elaborate the form, allowing it to frame many different types of texts. At Umm al-Rasas (Kastron Mefaa) in modern-day Jordan, several churches built in the sixth century showcase the efforts of a local mosaic workshop, possibly based in the nearby city of Madaba, to adapt the *clipeus* frame by elaborating its borders. In the Church of the Lions at Umm al-Rasas, dated by inscription to either 574 or 589, the main dedicatory inscription is framed inside a "shield" whose border is composed of concentric solid lines of red, gray, and yellow tesserae, each one tessera in width, set into the eastern end of the inhabited scroll of the nave pavement, towards the sanctuary.[116] Nearby is an even more visually striking set of mosaic *clipei* frame texts, in the pavement of the Church of the Bishop Sergius, dated to 587/588 by inscription. At the entrance to the nave,

Figure 3.20 Detail, inscription of the emperor Tiberius, tinned and gilded sword scabbard, found at Mainz, Germany, c. 15, now in the British Museum, London, BM1866,0806

Source: Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum

a *clipeus* with a border formed by a ring of miniature stepped merlons frames a dedication "for the salvation" of a number of donors. In the sanctuary, the main dedicatory inscription of the church appears within a *clipeus* with a wide red border, edged in orange tesserae and inset with diamond-shaped "jewels" and three-lobed leaves whose forms echo those of the flowering plants that surround the frame, the presence of which is made even more monumental by the two rams that flank it (Figure 3.21).[117] As at Aquileia, the sanctuary inscription emphasizes the "happy" state of affairs represented by the beneficence of the patrons, the bishop Sergius and the priest Procopius, and the decoration of the church, as the mosaics are produced "in the good times of our Lord" (Ἐν τοῖς/ ἀγαθοῖς χρόνοις/ τοῦ δεσπότου ἡμῶν). This latter inscription, placed in the sanctuary immediately in front of the altar, seems to have been designed especially for a clerical audience, drawing attention to itself through its elaborate circular frame but also visually elevating the names of the patrons through its richly colored jeweled border, promising clerics and congregants alike a continuing prosperity in the "good times" enjoyed under Sergius and Procopius. Other "shield" frames include multiple cable

Figure 3.21 Wreath-framed inscription, pavement of the sanctuary, Church of the Bishop Sergius, Umm al-Rasas, late sixth century

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

or guilloche borders that appear to be designed to add an apotropaic or protective meaning.[118] Some elements incorporated into the "shield" frame seem to be derived more directly from Roman sculptural traditions, including lotus flowers, as in the Church of St. George at Deir el-ʿAdas in Syria, built in 722, where a *clipeus*-type frame with a lotus border frames the donor's request for the "remission of his sins."[119] Even before reading the texts inside these "shield" frames, the shapes and sometimes elaborate borders would have signaled the presence of the names of the patrons of the building, encouraging viewers to regard them as exceptional individuals because of their architectural contributions.

A second round form used to frame Greek and Roman inscriptions, the wreath, was also adapted for use in late antique contexts. As a form with deep connections to the tradition of civic honors bestowed on worthy individuals in the Graeco-Roman world, the wreath-as-frame imbued texts associated with it, especially the names and titles of honorands, with an extra visual punch. Wreaths were awarded as prizes to the victors of athletic games, as on a stele from Greece, where wreaths of pine and celery leaves are inscribed with the names of the Panhellenic games at Isthmia and Nemea, flanking images of a shield from the games at Argos and an amphora of olive oil from the games at Athens (Figure 3.22).[120] Commissioned by

Figure 3.22 Marble relief fragment depicting athletic prizes, with wreath-framed inscription, Rhamnous, Greece, second century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (MMA 59.11.19), Rogers Fund, 1959

Source: Photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

an athletic victor from the city of Rhamnous in Attica, whose inscription appears below the wreaths, shield, and amphora, the stele transforms real prizes into images in stone, memorializing the illustrious career of the athlete, whose name does not survive on in the inscription. The wreath was imported into the arena of political iconography at an early date, and by the Roman period, the civic crown (*corona civica*), a crown of oak leaves tied by a fillet (ribbon), was awarded to soldiers who had saved the life of one of their comrades in battle,[121] and, later, worn by emperors in their role as civic leaders of Rome.[122] Wreaths retained their status as signifiers of triumph and authority in late antiquity, and they were still being given to victorious charioteers in the Hippodrome in Constantinople in the fifth and sixth centuries.[123]

Like the *clipeus*, the wreath fit within a visual vocabulary of honors given to exemplary citizens whose deeds – architectural, political, or athletic – were worthy of celebration and memory. Within late antique buildings, these forms were put to use as frames for donor inscriptions, signaling the contributions of those named to the community. In the fifth- or sixth-century Baths of Herakleides at Gadara (modern Umm Qais), one of the cities of the Decapolis in modern Jordan, two identical laurel wreaths tied with fillets and decorated with gems frame inscriptions wishing health to the patron of the baths, a certain Herakleides, and "to all those using the baths."[124] The mosaic pavement of the Gadara baths announces the deeds of the patron in text and in the frame that encircles the text, doubly recognizing his contribution to his fellow citizens, whose continued good health is included in the good wishes of the inscription.

Figure 3.23 Wreath-framed inscription, pavement of the synagogue at Tiberias, Israel, sixth century

Source: Photograph by Yair Talmor, image released into the public domain, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

As was the case with the *clipeus*-type frame, the wreath was not only used to frame secular texts. Wreaths quite similar to those found in the Gadara baths frame dedicatory texts inscribed in the pavements of late antique synagogues, including in the sixth-century synagogue at Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee in Israel, where a laurel wreath tied with fillets and adorned with two jewels frames a dedicatory inscription in Greek: "Proklos, son of Krispos built [this synagogue]" (Figure 3.23).[125] Flanked by framed panels containing Jewish ritual objects, the palm branch (*lulav*) and citron fruit (*ethrog*), the text speaks of the simultaneous Graeco-Roman and Jewish identity of the community at Tiberias.[126] Wreaths appear as inscription frames on the walls and ceilings of synagogues as well, as in the third-century synagogue at Dura Europos: in the synagogue, simple but vibrant red and black wreaths of flowers frame donors' inscriptions in Greek on the painted tiles that decorated the ceiling, though the Aramaic donor inscriptions from the same ceiling, at least one of which names the same donor, Abraham, are left unframed.[127] By framing their inscriptions within simple or more elaborate bejeweled wreaths, the Jewish communities of Dura and Tiberias presented their donors as traditional Roman *euergetai*, civically minded donors who had provided spaces in which the community could worship.[128]

In Christian contexts, the wreath continued to function as a symbol of achievement and authority, and it appears in churches as a frame for dedications and epitaphs, presenting the named individuals as important members of their communities.[129]

The wreath also gained significance as a symbol of Christian victory over death, especially the victory earned through martyrdom. Christian martyrs who sacrificed their lives for their faith were awarded wreath-crowns to signify their achievements, an award described by the late antique poet Prudentius, who describes the crowns earned by the saint Lawrence through his death:

> It is in this way, St. Lawrence, that we seek your passion; for you have two halls, your body here, and your soul in heaven. Admitted there as a citizen of the indescribable city, you wear the civic crown [*coronam civicam*] in that citadel where the eternal senate sits.[130]

As Prudentius makes clear, Lawrence has earned the honor of a double crown, recognizing his status as a martyr and civic hero.[131]

In church decorative programs, the martyr's crown often takes the form of a jeweled wreath, such as those carried by the saints on the walls of the nave of the sixth-century church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna.[132] The procession of female and male saints in the church hammers home the power of the wreath as a symbol for the viewer: as the eye moves from one saint to the next, it encounters wreath after wreath, making clear that each of these men and women, whose names appear above their heads, has proven his or her faith. An even more striking image of a crowned martyr appears in the small chapel of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro (St. Victor in the Golden Heaven) in Milan, a chapel dedicated to St. Victor attached to the church of Sant'Ambrogio, dedicated to the formidable church father Ambrose.[133] In the golden vault of the chapel, probably decorated in the fifth century, a bust portrait of Victor appears within a massive and slightly lopsided wreath made up of a number of different plants and vines, including lilies, roses, and grapevines (Figure 3.24). Within the wreath, another crown, this one made of jewels, hovers over Victor's head, doubly signifying his status as an important martyr as he clutches two large processional crosses, one of which is in the shape of the Chi-Rho.[134] An open codex with his name inside, *VIC/TOR*, appears to float in front of his chest, perhaps alluding to the presence of the saint's name in the Book of Life, the book used by God in His judgment described in the Book of Revelation.[135] Made of fiery red and yellow glass tesserae, the long page markers of the book, terminating in small ivy leaves, wrap their way around the bottom of the wreath, acting as the fillets that hold the wreath together and nicely binding the classical form in service to the new Christian tradition. Victor's book presents a compelling unity of classical and Christian wreath used to present the saint as the Christian martyr *par excellence* in his chapel.

Because of this new Christian valence connected especially to the saints, the wreath was used not only in the images of saints, but also in their names as crowned by martyrdom. Wreath-framed dedications to the saints survive, especially from Christian spaces in North Africa, a region in which devotion to martyrs was especially pronounced in late antiquity.[136] We have already seen the wreath-framed inscription of Reparatus in the Chlef basilica, which elevated the name of the priest, who may have been considered a martyr by the local congregation. In the triconch chapel attached to the south side of the basilica at Tébessa in Algeria, ancient

Figure 3.24 Detail of St. Victor, vault mosaic of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, Milan, fifth century

Source: Photograph by author

Theveste, built around 400, an inscription framed by a laurel wreath tied with fillets lists the names of the saints venerated by the congregation: "On the eleventh (day before) the first day [*kalends*] of January, the memorial [*memoria*] of the saints Heraclius, Donatius, Zebbocis, Secundianus, Victorianus, Publicia, and Meggenis (was built, or was decorated)."[137] These martyrs may have been companions of the most prominent martyr of the city of Theveste, St. Crispina, who was executed during the persecutions of the emperor Diocletian.[138] A number of other inscriptions, including epitaphs of congregants, a votive inscription of a deacon, and a warning against disturbing the memorial, cluster around the wreath-framed text, each framed by solid black lines as a simple rectangle or square, allowing clerics and lay members of the community to link themselves epigraphically and spatially with the martyrs while ensuring that their wreath-crowned names stand out.

Into the sixth century, the wreath continued to be used as a frame for inscriptions in churches and chapels dedicated to martyrs. On the pavement of the sixth-century chapel at the site of Dermech, outside of the ancient city of Carthage in Tunisia, six red wreaths decorated with jewels frame the names of saints, including famous saints such as Stephen, famed for being the first martyr (Acts 7), as well as the less well-known martyrs Speratus, Sirica (otherwise unattested), and Saturus

Figure 3.25 Inscriptions of saints' names framed by wreaths, pavement of the chapel, Dermech Basilica, Carthage, fifth century

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

and Saturninus, companions of the more famous saints of Carthage, Perpetua and Felicitas (Figure 3.25).[139] Appearing in a band immediately in front of the apse of the chapel, the "crowned" names of the martyrs would have served as a visual shorthand for the status of the named men and women, forever memorializing their reward for their faith. The inscription at Dermech presents an elegant synthesis of the verbal and the visual, allowing viewers who were not familiar with this mix of local and more famous saints to recognize their significance immediately. Nor were the mosaicists at Dermech the only ones to adopt this strategy in North Africa in the sixth century: in the Justinianic "East Church" at Qasr el-Lebia in modern-day Libya, stylized red wreaths frame not only the Greek inscriptions of the main patron of the church, Bishop Makarios, at the center of the nave pavement, but also the inscription placed in the chapel attached to the south aisle of the church, the latter of which emphasizes the connection of the space to martyred saints: "Your testimonies are exceedingly credible; (holiness) befits your house (Lord) for all days."[140] This particular pavement has drawn attention for its combination of images of animals and personifications of the four rivers of Paradise as well as of *ktisis* (foundation) and *kosmesis* (adornment), but its martyrial inscription has remained understudied.[141] The text of the inscription is in fact a quotation from Psalm 92 (93):5, which, in its context in the chapel, constructs a holiness grounded in architecture – the church and chapel as the "house" (*oikos*) of the inscription – and plays on the meaning of the word "martyr" (μάρτυς), which also meant a "witness": here, the term "testimonies" (μαρτύρια), derived from the same word, refers not only to the sure words of God, but also to the shrines of the martyrs.[142] At Qasr el-Lebia, the wreath frame emphasizes the martyrial character of the space, a chapel dedicated to individuals who sacrificed their lives as they "testified" their faith.

Object frames and Christian innovation

The *tabula*, *clipeus*, and wreath frames at which we have looked frame a complicated story that makes clear the continuing power of classical forms in late antiquity: forms that slide between foreground and background and, in these

movements, reveal aspects of the complex relationship between word, image, and space in the period. However, while antique forms were still overwhelmingly popular, certain patrons chose more specifically Christian forms to frame their dedicatory texts, including the forms of particular objects associated with Christian sacred history and the liturgy. While these object frames are in some sense exceptions to the rule, their distinctive appearances and clear symbolic resonances call for further examination, as they participated in a different kind of verbal-visual game than did the *tabula*, directly converting inscriptions into meaningful Christian images. Unlike the fascinating *carmina cancellata* of the fourth-century poet Optatian, poems that contained images within themselves, these frames impose themselves upon relatively standard dedications, shaping the exteriors of their texts into the outlines of objects so that inscriptions turn into images.[143] These forms affect (or, as James Elkins would have it, infect) the texts from the outside, sometimes threatening to overwhelm the meanings of the texts inside but, if read in certain ways, are able to expand the meanings of their texts.[144]

The clearest, and most unusual, "object" frame is the flask frame, extant only in a single example from the late antique period, in the pavement mosaics of the atrium of the fifth-century Church of the Holy Apostles at Anemurium (Anamur in modern Turkey) (Figure 3.26).[145] Although some have classified this frame as having a chalice shape, the forms of the flaring mouth and body have more in common with those of late antique silver flasks or ewers.[146] The body of the vessel frame is bulbous, with elaborate and delicate handles that terminate in winding scrolls. The

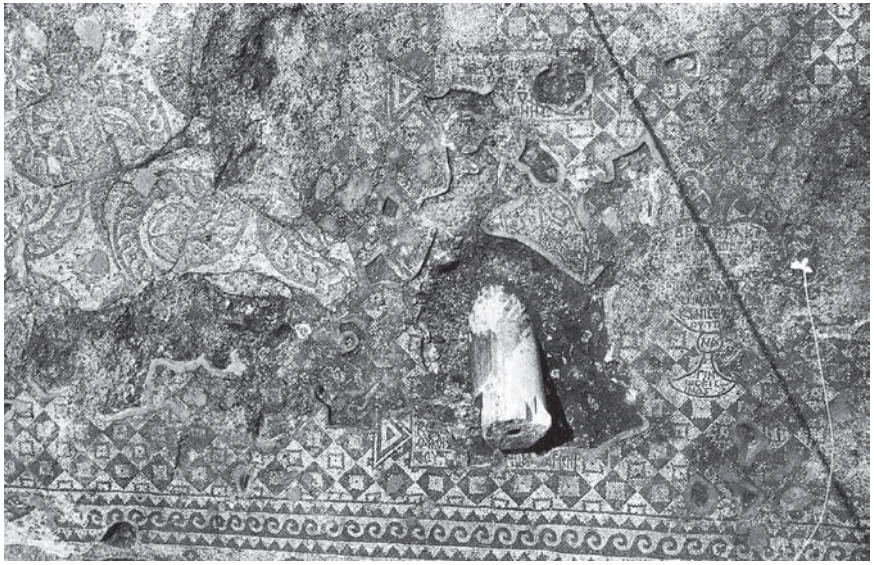

Figure 3.26 "Flask"-framed inscription (to the right side of the photo), pavement of the atrium, Church of the Holy Apostles, Anemurium, Turkey, fifth century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Sheila Campbell

form is also close to that of the late antique *kantharos*, originally a two-handled Greek drinking cup that morphed into an amphorae-like form popular in Christian mosaics.[147] Regardless of which specific container the frame reproduces, the form was clearly chosen for its special significance as a vessel. At Anemurium, the vessel form defines the layout of the inscription contained within, oriented to the west and meant to be read by those exiting the church:

Δέσποτα Κ(ύρι)ε
καρδιωγνῶστα, ἐκ τῶ(ν)
σῶν δωρημάτων ϙ[ο]ι
[ε]ὐχαριϛτῶ(ν) προσήνε[γκα]
πρόσδ[εξ]ε αὐτὰ εἰ[ϛ]
ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν
κ(αὶ) μνίσθητι Κ(ύρι)ε
οὗ τὸ ὄνο-
μα
γιν-
ώσκις.
Ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ϛ΄

> Lord, master, knower of men's hearts, from your gifts I gave in thanksgiving. Accept them for the remission of my sins and Lord, remember him whose name you know. In the sixth year of the indiction.[148]

This inscription is a patterned or shaped text, the words on the floor wrestled into the form of a recognizable object.[149] Works with a long classical history, pattern texts, especially pattern poems (*carmina figurata*, or *technopaegnia*), were written in the shapes of objects that were related in some way to the content of the texts.[150] By reading these poems as words and images simultaneously, readers were able to move playfully between the works' visual and verbal spheres of meaning. The Anemurium inscription is not written in verse, but its shape still shaped the reception of the inscription in significant ways. Although the imposed frame actually made the inscription much harder to read, especially along the thin "stem" of the vessel, the distinctive shape perhaps made the text within more memorable, turning text into a commemorative object that would have been easier to slot into the mental architecture of memory as one walked out of the church.[151] Other vessel shapes were used to frame text in the Roman period, including a striking set of four inscriptions from the atrium of the first-century CE House of Aulus Umbricius Scaurus at Pompeii, where the forms of one-handled jars (*urceus*) are inscribed with their contents (fish sauce, *garum*) and with the name of the sauce-producing workshop of Scaurus himself.[152] In its Christian context, however, the Anemurium frame evoked not just vessels for transportation and trade, but the silver liturgical vessels for the Eucharistic wine that would have rested on the altar, in turn recalling Christ's identity as the "true vine" (John 15:1), whose blood was signified by the wine.[153] By framing

the personal, anonymous donation inscription, written in the first person, in the form of a liturgical vessel, the artist and patron emphasize the "gifts" given to the church, which may have included actual liturgical vessels in addition to the mosaic.[154] Like the Tegea *tabula*, this frame was yet another sculptural text-object superimposed upon a pavement, the vessel form translated from sculpture to mosaic but retaining the illusion of a third dimension so that it breaks the surface of the otherwise flat pavement, adding a more specific sense of depth than do the two nearby "superimposed" *tabulae* in the same pavement.

The frame at Anemurium evokes both a real object – a liturgical vessel – and acts as a symbolic stand-in for Christ and the Eucharistic ritual, imparting a powerful additional significance to the text it contains. Another object frame, the cross, is even more direct in its symbolism. In the so-called "Church of the Inscription" at Hâs, near Apamea in Syria, dated to 388/389 CE, an inscription in the form of a cross decorated the main part of the mosaic pavement of the building. The mosaic is not extant today, but its layout is clear from drawings made shortly after its discovery:

In the time of Barbeosos,
priest,
and Thalasios
and Marinos
and Dios,
deacons,
in the year 700 (388/389 CE), by Theodoros, Marao [---],
Diogenes, Marinos, Moki[mos ---],
Signones, Markellinos, [and ---],
dekaprotoi, in the [second] indiction;
[---]nes and Markellos, mosaic-layers [---]
in Christ
"mosaic-
ed" thi-
s
panel.
Christ, help.[155]

The content of the inscription within the frame is unremarkable, composed of a lengthy list of priests, deacons, and other ecclesiastical officials who are mentioned to date the construction of the mosaic as well as to designate those named as patrons. In the surviving portion of the text, at least two mosaic artisans, including Markellos, are named as well, and the inscription concludes with a plaintive invocation: "Christ, help" (Χριστὲ βοήθι). While the frame would immediately have evoked associations with Christ and His sacrifice for mankind, it is important to remember that the cross could have a number of different material and performative significances for viewers, including as a protective device on jewelry or garments, as a gesture made to accompany a prayer, or as a full-body pose adopted in imitation of Christ's position on the cross.[156]

The full range of potential meanings that artists and viewers assigned to the cross is too wide to examine here, but we can narrow our frame for the frame by looking at other uses of the cross as a shape for text. In its form and content, the inscription most closely resembles cross-shaped funerary inscriptions, including a number of Greek epitaphs such as those on fifth-century tombstones from Zoara (biblical Zoar) in modern Jordan.[157] However, unlike these inscriptions, whose cross frames act as guarantees of salvation for the deceased, the frame of the Hâs inscription seems to function as a protective device, turning the text into a material prayer on behalf of donors who are still living. Related invocations associated with the names of donors are inscribed on crosses intended for liturgical use as well as smaller crosses meant to be worn on the body, including on a sixth- or seventh-century cross from Epiros in Greece, now in Munich, whose votive inscription reads: "Lord . . . have mercy on the donors."[158] As does the Epiros cross, many crosses feature inscriptions that include invocations on behalf of the donors, in addition to quotations of passages from the Old or New Testament.[159] The Hâs inscription predates any surviving inscribed processional crosses, but there is a strong implied connection between this cross-text (which despite its shape is read in the usual way, from the top downwards) and the inscribed processional crosses used in the liturgy.[160]

Other cross-texts read as enlarged (and flattened) versions of more miniature crosses. In the center of the sanctuary pavement of the seventh-century phase of the Church of St. Lot at Dayr ʿAin ʿAbata in Jordan, a shorter cross-shaped inscription reads: "+ Good end" (+ τέλος καλόν) (Figure 3.27).[161] The layout of the mosaic

Figure 3.27 "Good End," inscription from the sanctuary pavement, Church of St. Lot, Dayr ʿAin ʿAbata, Jordan, seventh century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Konstantinos Politis

inscription, with "end" (τέλος) running along the upright and "good" (καλόν) placed along the horizontal cross arm, each letter placed into a square in the grid, forces the reader to use the letter "L" (*lambda*) twice, a device used by other pattern texts of the period, further strengthening the link between the visual and verbal elements of the text. The layout of two words of the same length that intersect at one central letter may have reminded viewers of an even more popular cross-text from the period, one that refers to Christ as the "light" and "life" (φῶς ζωῆ) of the world, as in John 8:12: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Joined by the central letter *omega*, with "light" on the vertical arm and "life" on the horizontal, this formula was most often found in miniature on items of clothing or on tiny cross pendants meant to be worn on the body, though it too found its way into mosaic pavements.[162] These two pairs of words seem to have been inextricably tied to their cross shape, and artists were able to play with the scale of the formulae between contexts and mediums, from miniature objects on the body to the larger mosaics of church floors.

While the "light, life" cross-text acted as a kind of self-generated logo for Christ as *Logos*, formed of words that He was purported to have spoken, and was transposable between personal and more public contexts (jewelry, clothing, mosaic), the cross-text at Dayr ʿAin ʿAbata was more particularly linked to the space in which it was displayed. Placed in the sanctuary, and thus presumably targeted at the clergy, this pattern text was a supplication for either a good end to mortal life on earth, or the hope of resurrection and a "good end" in heaven thanks to Christ's redeeming death on the cross. The yellow tesserae of the frame emphasize the form's links with gold crosses worn as jewelry, while the position of the frame, within an inhabited vine scroll and between two lambs, unites three alternate ways to refer to Christ: the cross on which He was crucified, as "true vine" (John 15:1–8), and as "Lamb of God" (John 1:29). At Dayr ʿAin ʿAbata, the pairing of cross-framed inscription, vine, and lambs near the altar where the Eucharist was celebrated was a most elegant articulation in text and image of Christ's own life and death.[163]

Although the form of the frame is linked to its content in different ways in each of the examples considered here, in all cases the forms of the vessel and the cross sanctify the text within and emphasize the connections between text, space, and the redemptive power of Christ. Like the frames of ancient pattern poems and prose texts, the object frames imposed themselves upon their texts, visually quoting the shapes of objects that were present and active in the same space as the inscriptions, a play between two and three dimensions and between objects in different media and of different scales that animated otherwise flat, two-dimensional texts with Christian meaning. By turning text into specifically meaningful Christian image, these frames – forms that have been overlooked thus far – are an important witness to the development of a Christian visual culture that adapted Roman frames and framing principles to suit new religious contexts and preferences of artists, patrons, and viewers.[164]

Framing religious experience

The frames of late antique inscriptions, especially (though not exclusively) texts written in mosaic, were forms that had the power to attract viewers to their textual contents and, in so doing, to shape the reception of the interiors of sacred buildings. Frames could merge with their external grounds, as did the stretched *tabula* frame in the Church of Lot and Procopius at Khirbet Mukhayyat, ceding the field to their verbal contents; or they could aggressively assert themselves, as did the vessel and cross frames, drawing upon the full powers of their forms to demand the attention of viewers and shape the readings of their contents. These mosaic frames, as integral to their works as Derrida's *parerga* were to their images, played on the tension between text, image, and medium, converting inscriptions into artworks that variously evoked either a Roman aesthetics of dedication or a Christian system of symbols, or occasionally both.

A final "object" frame type that drew upon the properties of the architectural spaces in which it was used was the architectural façade, a form that we previously encountered in the chapel of Reparatus in the Chlef basilica. This frame was used to enhance the monumental appearance of texts, including inscribed pilgrim graffiti[165] as well as epitaphs.[166] In its surviving mosaic iterations, the architectural façade frame is used in a distinct manner, revealing the processes through which Roman frames became charged with new Christian meanings.[167] Besides the frame at Chlef, the best surviving example of this type of frame adorns the pavement of the mid-sixth-century Upper Chapel of Priest John at Khirbet Mukhayyat (Mount Nebo), near the Church of Lot and Procopius that we examined previously (Figure 3.28).[168]

Figure 3.28 Temple-framed dedication, pavement of the Upper Chapel of Priest John, Khirbet Mukhayyat, mid-sixth century

Source: After Piccirillo 1989a, 190, by kind permission of Studium Biblicum Franciscanum

The mosaic pavement at the eastern end of the main chapel contains a finely executed façade viewed frontally, with a triangular pediment and four columns separating the main "entrance," where the inscription is placed, from two side "entrances," each filled with a golden three-legged candelabrum holding a single lit candle. The structure is elaborately decorated with a shell-shaped niche immediately above the central opening, striated marble columns with Corinthian capitals, and a pediment embellished with a colorful repeated floral-vegetal border. Cocks perch on either side of the roof, peacocks flank the structure, and fruit trees and flowers fill the rest of the space. While the scene is somewhat confusing spatially, the scale of the frame ensures viewers would have focused on it, and the natural elements (animals, foliage) establish the appropriate reading, placing the viewer outside (the image of) the building, looking in. The dedicatory text within the frame reads:

Ὑπὲρ σωτερί-
ας κ(αὶ) προσφορᾶς
τῶν δούλων σου
Σεργίου Στεφάνου
κ(αὶ) Προκοπίου Πορ-
φυρίας κ(αὶ) Ῥώμης κ(αὶ)
Μαρίας κ(αὶ) Ἰουλια-
νοῦ μοναχοῦ.

> For the salvation and the offering of your servants Sergios, son of Stephanos, and Prokopios, son of Porphyria, and Roma and Maria and Ioulianos, monk.[169]

The architectural frame turns text into monument, and reinforces the architectural "offering" (προσφορᾶς) of the donors, but it also does something even more specific: it imports the image of the Jerusalem Temple into the Christian interior.[170] Similar structures that evoke the Temple, which had been destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, were used to represent the door to the Temple or the Ark of the Covenant on the floors of synagogues, as in the synagogue at Beth Alpha, where birds perch on the roof, candelabra (or *menorot*) appear to either side, and a similar shell niche and colorfully patterned columns adorn the front of the building.[171] By bringing the image of the Jewish Temple into the church at Khirbet Mukhayyat, and placing it in a paradisiacal setting as a frame for a Christian dedication, the artists declared the triumph of Christianity over its monotheistic predecessor, Judaism, in images appropriated from the decorative program of the synagogue. Even more importantly for our purposes, this use of the building-as-frame for text reveals artists turning to Judeo-Christian images for their frames instead of to Graeco-Roman forms. Although it may have possessed classical Roman significances for some viewers, who might have connected it to the similar frames on sarcophagi, this architectural frame, as well as the cross and vessel frames, is (and were) demonstrably Christian.[172] While certain classical forms such as the *tabula* continued to coexist with new object frames, the latter make visible the process through which Christians developed their own ways of framing texts, images, and experiences, creating a distinct language of the frame.

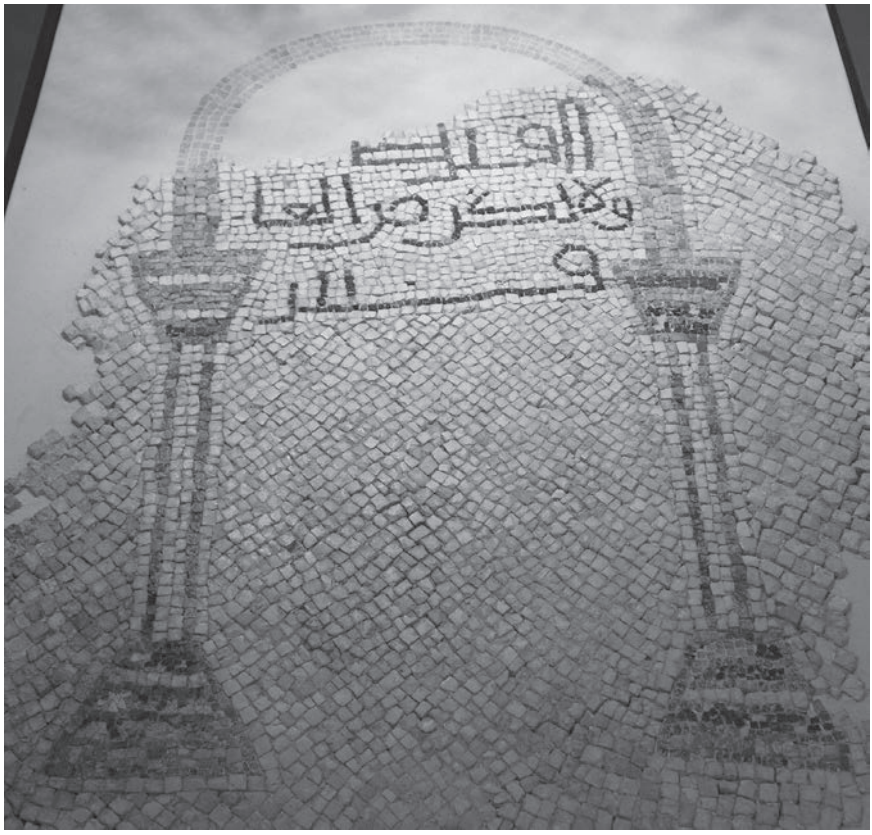

Figure 3.29 Qurʾanic inscription in a mihrab frame, pavement of a private mosque, Ramla, Israel, Umayyad or Abbasid period

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Interestingly, at least in one case, the architectural text-frame was adapted for use in an early Islamic context. In a mosaic pavement excavated in Ramla in modern-day Israel, probably from an Umayyad- or perhaps Abbasid-era house, an arch frames two inscriptions in Arabic (Figure 3.29).[173] The interpretation of the first line of the text is debated, but appears to be either a kind of label for the space (*al-qibla*, indicating the direction of prayer) or a fragmentary Qurʾanic quotation from Sura 7:205, asking the reader to remember to pray morning and evening. The second line is a quotation drawn from that same sura: "and be thou not of the neglectful" (Sura 7:205). The pavement, probably from a private mosque inside the house, appears to have functioned as a *mihrab*, orienting the reader towards Mecca and defining the prayer niche on the floor instead of on the wall, though the nearby wall may have had a more standard niche as well.[174] Strikingly, the two texts are written in different materials – the first line in dark gray stone tesserae,

the second line in glass – adopting the same material strategy used in late antique Christian inscriptions, seen in the previous chapter, to convey the holy nature of the word of Allah according to the Qurʾan.

Framing frames

For late antique viewers, the frames of inscriptions in churches, chapels, monasteries, synagogues, and mosques were not neutral. Rather, they served as forms that not only isolated text from surrounding images and patterns, but also conveyed often complicated extra-verbal messages. For their Christian, Jewish, and Muslim patrons, artists adopted Graeco-Roman forms to signal the texts that they contained should be "read" as markers of dedication in the classical mode, or adapted these forms to reflect new Christian affiliations. By charting the evolution of one of the most common types of inscription frame, the *tabula ansata*, we get a glimpse of the complicated ways that artists translated this form for the sacred interiors of different confessional groups, using the flexibility of the medium of mosaic to endow the text within the *tabula* with added classicizing or Christian meaning. Round frames borrowed from the Roman visual grammar of honors, such as the *clipeus* and the wreath, were employed in similar fashions, conveying different messages depending on their context. The flexible object frame shaped Greek and Latin text into an image of dedicated object (the vessel), a sign of Christian salvation (the cross), or architecture (a frame popular across all three Abrahamic faiths), doubling the dedication of the donor or echoing the structure of the interior itself to draw attention to the objects and architectural gifts that patrons had given.

Exploiting the flexibility of their medium, mosaicists were able to preserve the illusion that framed inscriptions were in fact three-dimensional forms, opening up a sense of space on the floors and walls of buildings, and turning framed texts into sites of contact with the dedications and prayers of donors. As in the basilica at Chlef, with which we began the chapter, the ways that texts were arranged and framed in late antique buildings directly influenced audiences' modes of engagement with the texts, but also the entirety of their visits to these spaces. Frames not only framed their texts, then, but powerfully shaped the visual and physical experiences of audiences inside Christian, Jewish, and early Islamic buildings.

Notes

1 Exceptions to the rule include Ehlich 1953; Kitzinger 1977, especially 53–6, 81–92; Kinney and Cutler 1994, on the frames of images on ivory consular diptychs; Kemp 1996, on the framed images of the Santa Sabina doors; Peers 2004; Platt and Squire 2017a. More work has been done on the frames of western medieval images: e.g. Camille 1992; Tronzo 1999. On the frame as a historically determined and manmade (rather than a natural) form, Schapiro 1972.

2 On the church, see especially Caillet 1987a; Yasin 2009, 140–3; Jensen 2014, with previous bibliography.

3 Caillet 1987a, 143; Burns, Jr. and Jensen 2014, 131–4; Jensen 2014, 102. On churches with two apses in North Africa, Duval 1973.

4 See especially Daszewski 1977; Molholt 2011. Jensen 2014, 114, offers further parallels.
5 Daszewski 1977, 124–5, with previous bibliography.
6 This tradition was still alive in the literature of late antiquity: for example, in Nonnus's *Dionysiaca*, the god Dionysus delivers a speech to Ariadne as he woos her on the island of Naxos, referencing the help Ariadne gave to Theseus: *Dionysiaca* 47.437. Writing in the sixth century, the North African-born poet Corippus includes a mention of the labyrinth: *Iohannis (De Bellis Libycis)* 4.597–613; on this text, Moreschini 2007, especially 193–6. Ariadne's thread is present in several Roman mosaics, including in the labyrinth pavement of the Great East Baths at Mactar in Tunisia, dated to 199 CE: Molholt 2011, 296–7, with previous bibliography. On late antique images of the labyrinth generally, Daszewski 1977.
7 The inscription is *CIL* 8, 9710; *ILCV* 1, no. 1580; Daszewski 1977, 37–9, 44, 57, 63, 102–3, pl. 57; Caillet 1987a, 151–3.
8 On these types of poems, see Squire 2011, 197–246, with further bibliography.
9 After Squire 2011, 127.
10 Gregory of Nyssa, *Or. Cat*. 35, *PG* 45, 88B; trans. Jensen 2014, 115.
11 On the physical experience of Roman labyrinth mosaics, Molholt 2011. On medieval labyrinths, see especially Doob 1990. The work of Lucy Donkin on medieval mosaics and liturgical movement is also relevant here: Donkin 2005.
12 *CIL* 8.9712; Caillet 1987a, 153.
13 Jensen 2014, 111–13.
14 The inscription is *ILCV* 1, no. 1821; *CIL* 8, 9708; Caillet 1987a, 146, trans. Yasin 2009, 141: *Pro(vinciae anno) / CCLXXX et V XII kal(endas) / Dec(embres), eius basilicae / fundamenta posita / sunt et [---]/ prov(inciae anno) CC et [--- in?]/ mente habea[s ---]/servum Dei [--- et in?]/ Deo vivas*.
15 Yasin 2009, 143; following Caillet 1987a, 157–9.
16 On these frames, Maguire 1994; also Leatherbury Forthcoming B.
17 On the inscription and the identity of Marinus, which is unclear, but who may have been the founder of the church, Caillet 1987a, 153–4; Jensen 2014, 102–3.
18 *CIL* 8, 9711; *ILCV* 1, no. 1119; Caillet 1987a, 153–4; visual presentation given in Jensen 2014, 103, fig. 2, after Vidal 1936, fig. 26.
19 Yasin 2009, 140; Jensen 2014, 108.
20 *ILCV* 1, no. 1104; *CIL* 8, 9709; Caillet 1987a, 155–6; trans. Jensen 2014, 108, with slight adaptations: *Hic requies/cit sanctae memo/riae pater noster / Reparatus, ep(iscopu)s qui fe/cit in sacerdotium an/nos VIIII, men(ses) XI, et pre/cessit nos in pace / die undecimu kal(endas) / Augustas prou(i)nc(iae anno) CCCCXXX / et sexta*.
21 Jensen 2014, 109, who argues that the burial of Reparatus directly behind the western apse may have been a secondary burial, raising the possibility that the community at Chlef treated his bones as relics. Wreaths were sometimes used as frames for funerary inscriptions, especially in North African churches: for example, two laurel wreath frames surround epitaphs in the pavement of the late fourth- or early fifth-century Church of the Priest Felix at Kélibia in Tunisia, now on display in the Bardo Museum in Tunis, each of which records two names (Constantia and Gaudiosa; Peregrinus and Valeria), implying that the individuals within each inscription are connected to each other through blood or marriage: Cintas and Duval 1958, pls. XIII, XXIV.
22 On the visual influence of document types on the reading and interpretation of Roman inscriptions, Kruschwitz 2008; Kruschwitz and Campbell 2009.
23 Derrida, "Parergon," in Derrida 1978b; published in English as Derrida 1987, 1–13, 15–147. In his essay, Derrida responds to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment,* part of his third critique or *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*), first published in 1791. On their respective analyses of the frames of pictures, Simmel 1994; Crowther 2009, 52–9; Tagg 2009, 246–9; Platt and Squire 2017a. On the verbal

and physical frames of works of texts ("paratexts"), also relevant here, see Genette 1997; Jansen 2014.

24 Derrida 1987, 61; also Duro 1996, 2–3; Tagg 2009, 246.
25 Schapiro 1972, 9–12.
26 Schapiro 1972, 12.
27 Simon 1996, 13.
28 For example, the catalogs of several museum exhibitions in the 1990s, including Newbery, Bisacca, and Kanter 1990; Simon 1996. On the value given to frames in Italy during the Renaissance, Savedoff 1999, especially 348; and, applying these ideas to ancient art, Kiilerich 2001.
29 Including Ehlich 1953; Kitzinger 1977, 53–6, 81–92; Kinney and Cutler 1994; Peers 2004; Elsner 2008; Platt and Squire 2017a.
30 While the geometric patterns of late antique mosaics are much discussed and frame types are classified, a recent survey typifies the problem and has but one sentence to say on the subject of frames: "The usual location of the inscriptions recording donors, benefactors and donations on mosaic floors is within a *tabula ansata*, a wreath, or a rectangular panel": Hachlili 2009, 237. A rare exception is Kiilerich 2011, who (briefly) begins to consider the potential meanings of different forms of frames for late antique inscriptions.
31 As public religious gatherings moved from outside (in pagan practice) to inside (in Christian practice), the public dedicatory inscriptions of Roman temple exteriors also moved inside. This move of texts has still not been discussed in a comprehensive fashion, but see the discussion in Chapter 1.
32 See especially Agosti 2010a, who emphasizes the enhanced legibility of these formats; Agosti 2015a.
33 Hachlili 2009, 237.
34 As were the martyr inscriptions put up by Damasus in the catacombs of Rome, discussed in Chapter 6.
35 The inscription, in its four octagons, reads:

1 Χ(ριστὸ)ς / ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς τὸν οἶ/κον τοῦτον / ἀνήγει/ρεν
2 ἐπὶ / Σεργίου / τοῦ ὁσιω(τάτου) / ἐπισκό/που
3 σπου/δῆ Σεργίου πρ(εσβυτέρου) τοῦ ἁγίου Αἰλι/ανοῦ ἐν τῷ ϒϘ΄ ἔτει.
4 [ἐ]ψη/[φώθ]η ἐκ / [προσφ]ορᾶς / [---] / [---].

"Christ God has raised this building in the time of the most pious priest Sergius, by the zeal of the priest Sergius of St. Elianus, in the year 490 (595/596 CE) . . . was decorated with mosaic from the offering of . . .": Séjourné 1897, especially 649; *I.Jordanie* 147; Piccirillo 1989a, 74, 1993, 125. Interestingly, an almost-identical strategy was used by the mosaicists at the Battir church, where four inscriptions framed in squares begin with the same or similar words as does the Elianus text (ὑπέρ, ἐπί, and σπουδῆ): Avi-Yonah 1933, 142–3, no. 13; Di Segni 2003a, 258–9; also *SEG* 8–230a – d; *SEG* 30–1687; *SEG* 32–1501; *SEG* 42–1433. In the west, linked frames also appear in the floor mosaics of Santa Eufemia in Grado, dated to the late sixth century: Caillet 1993, 226–7, with previous bibliography. These functions were already recognized implicitly by Carl Maria Kaufmann in his handbook of early Christian epigraphy: Kaufmann 1917, 405–8.

36 On this frame, see Chapter 6.
37 On this text, Leatherbury 2016a.
38 When Greek and Roman authors report inscriptions in literary works, however, they typically do mention the supports of inscriptions, including mosaic, statue bases, etc., from which we can sometimes make inferences about frame types: for discussion of these issues, see Liddell and Low 2013.
39 On Roman epigraphic production, of which carved inscriptions were a major part, see Susini 1973; Edmondson 2015. On these trends, see Chapter 1.

40 See the discussion in Chapter 2.
41 On frames as sites of contact, Peers 2004.
42 On the effects of this framing strategy in contemporary museums, Yasin 2005.
43 See the discussion in Chapter 1.
44 On this effect, Leatherbury 2018.
45 In the church, the *tabula ansata* serves a similar spatial function to the low chancel screens that often divide the sanctuary from the nave, restricting access to the altar to the clergy alone: Spieser 1995; Gerstel 2006. For an analysis of the related dividing function of mosaic pavements in churches, Kitzinger 1970. On the function of medieval church mosaic and *opus sectile* floors to guide movement during the liturgy, Donkin 2005, 2013. On the use of floor mosaics to define spaces and organize movement within Roman homes, Swift 2009, 27–104.
46 On other late antique and medieval uses of inscriptions to frame the reactions of viewers to images and interiors, in addition to the discussion in Chapter 4, see Yasin 2009, especially 189–208; Weinryb 2011.
47 The generic term *tabula* is used in classical literature to describe various types of writing tablets or inscription plaques both small and large, but the term *tabula ansata* is a completely modern designation, invented in the nineteenth century: Fraser and Rönne 1957, 179–82; Pani 1986, especially 430 n. 2; Meyer 2004, 21–9. Roman authors often referred to inscription plaques as *tituli*, the same term that they used to refer to the texts written *onto* the plaques: Östenberg 2009a, 68–9, 2009b; Mayer i Olivé 2012; Leatherbury 2018.
48 As in an fragmentary example now in the British Museum, BM 1868,0110.4; see Fraser and Rönne 1957, 179–82.
49 On the formal evolution of the *tabula*, Albert 1972; Veyne 1983, especially 289–90; Mayer i Olivé 2012, 224–5.
50 Fraser and Rönne 1957, 178.
51 It is difficult to pin down exactly when this transformation occurred, but by the Hellenistic period, triangular *ansae* began to be used: Fraser and Rönne 1957, 182; for examples in Egypt, where the form was used for mummy labels, Ehlich 1953, 55–6, Abb. 15–16. The form may have been related to that of the axe-head (*ascia*), though there is no direct evidence of this connection: for this argument, Pani 1986, 435.
52 Including an example in the British Museum dated to the second century, a votive plaque dedicated to the goddess Feronia: BM 1868,0520.54; its inscription is *CIL* 6, 147.
53 As at Pergamon: Albert 1972, 2–5, Kat B2, B9.
54 Now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, MMA 21.88.172; for other Roman metal votive *tabulae*, Walser 1984, e.g. cat. nos. 1–4, 7–9, 17, etc; Mayer i Olivé 2012.
55 Ryberg 1955, 146, pl. LII, fig. 79b; Pfanner 1983, 50–65, 71–6, pls. 54–67. For the tradition of the Roman triumph in reality and art, Beard 2007, 43–5, 151–3; Popkin 2016. On the triumph itself, described by Suetonius, Beard 2003, especially 548–52. On the general military valence of the *tabula,*Thomas 2007, 44–5; also Corbier 2006, 97–8. This usage seems to have continued into the fourth century, as attested by a relief from Caesarea (Cherchell) in Algeria, which depicts an inscribed *tabula* carried on a pole during a triumph celebrating Constantine's victory over Maxentius in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge: its inscription is *CIL* 8, 9356; on the relief, Torelli 1982, pl. V, 6; Mastino and Teatini 2001.
56 Östenberg 2009a, 111–19, who argues the plaques held *tituli* proclaiming the identities of the booty and captives in the procession, or perhaps the actions accomplished, as with the famous *titulus* of Julius Caesar that read "*Veni, vidi, vici*," described by Suetonius; also Östenberg 2009b. Pani 1986 argues that this was the original function of the form, but no evidence of a similar usage exists from the Greek world. A single wooden *tabula* survives from the Roman fortress at Carlisle in England, though no traces of text are present on the form; the presence of nails in the *ansae* would seem to

indicate that the frame was nailed onto a stationary support such as a wall rather than carried in procession: Caruana 1987.

57 Thomas 2007, 192–4. Examples of dedications include an early fourth-century CE inscription recording the renovation of the public baths on the eastern part of the Caelian Hill at Rome: *CIL* 6, 1136. Examples of funerary inscriptions include Fraser and Rönne 1957, no. 19; also, the blank *tabula* (meant to contain a painted inscription) from the lid of the third-century CE Ludovisi Battle sarcophagus, now in the Romisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz (the body is in the Palazzo Altemps in Rome): Rodenwaldt 1929; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 102–3, fig. 101; Wrede 2001, 66–8, pls. 62–3, with previous bibliography. Similar *tabulae* appear as frames for epitaphs in the first-century columbarium tombs in Rome, many of which were left blank to accommodate epitaphs as the tombs filled up: Borbonus 2014, 108, 165–7, 170–1.

58 The inscription is *CIL* 14, 4709; Becatti 1940, especially 44.

59 Thomas 2007, 191, who sees the tablet as an "effective form for emphasizing any public political message."

60 Including on late antique ivory diptychs issued by consuls to celebrate their new position: Sartori 2007.

61 For example, *tabulae*-framed dedicatory inscriptions erected by Lycians, who began to use the form in Asia Minor in the second century: Thomas 2007, 82–3.

62 The inscription is *CIS* 4134; also al-Asaad and Yon 2001, 104, no. 32.

63 E.g. a painted *tabula* with a Greek inscription in the Yale University Art Gallery, YUAG 1935.95.

64 On the *tabula* as a "sign" for writing, Pani 1986, 434.

65 Pani 1986; Mayer i Olivé 2012, 225–31. Mayer i Olivé argues that the frame should be seen as an expression of "Roman" cultural identity (though this seems a slightly reductionist view). Interestingly, the use of the *tabula* to frame obscene graffiti at Pompeii would seem to indicate that the "public" or "official" meaning of the form was so ingrained as to engender parody: Kruschwitz and Campbell 2009, 67, 69–70, 82.

66 On the visual recognition of document types in the Roman period: Meyer 2004; Kruschwitz and Campbell 2009.

67 For example, on the obverse of a lead pilgrim ampulla from Jerusalem, now at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC (BZ.1948.14): Evans with Ratliff 2012, 91–2, cat. 59, with previous bibliography. On this sign, reported in all four Gospels: Millar 1995. A wooden *titulus* plaque kept in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was thought by pilgrims in the period to be the plaque from Christ's crucifixion: Piacenza Pilgrim, *Travels* 20; on this text, Wilkinson 1977, 83.

68 Kartsonis 1994; Peers 2004, 13–34; Harley-McGowan 2007. The ivory is the Borradaile Triptych, probably made in Constantinople in the tenth century, now in the British Museum: BM 1923.1205.1; Buckton 1994, 142–3, ill. on 153. While no text is carved onto/into the *tabula*, the work may originally have borne a painted text.

69 For artist inscriptions, Donderer 1989. An early example of a dedicatory inscription decorates the Villa of Apollo and the Muses at Mérida in Spain: *C(olonia) A(ugusta) E(merita) f(ecerunt) Seleucus et Anthus*: Donderer 1989, 105–6, no. 83; Pallarès 1997, 57–8, no. BA2, pls. 11a–b; Lancha 1997, 213–18, no. 105, pl. XCIX.

70 Becatti 1961, 64–85, nos. 83–138, 345–8, pls. 172–86; Pohl 1978, especially 332–4. The inscription, which advertises the services of ship caulkers and rope makers, is *CIL* 14, 4m, 549, 1: *Clodius Primiginius / Claudius Crescens q(uin)q(uennales) / stuppatores res(tio)*.

71 The percentage appears to be around 70%, based on published inscriptions: see Leatherbury 2012, 195–200.

72 On the mosaics, Piccirillo 1993, 164; Leatherbury 2016b. The text is *SEG* 8–336; *I.Jordanie* 97; Di Segni in Piccirillo and Alliata 1998, no. 42:

> Ἐπὶ τοῦ ἁγιω(τάτου) κ(αὶ) ὡσιω(τάτου) Ἰωάννου ἐπισκό(που) ἐκτήσθη κ(αὶ)
> ἐτελιώθη ὡ ἅγιος τώπως σ<πο>υδῖ

Βαρίχα πρεσβυτήρου κ(αὶ) παραμοναρίου αὐτοῦ, ἐν μηνὶ Νοεμβρίῳ χρόνον ἔκτιν ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος).
Ὁ <Θ>(εὸ)ς τοῦ ἁγίου Λὸτ κ(αὶ) τοῦ ἁγίου Προκοπίου, πρόσδεξε τὶν προσφορὰν κ(αὶ) τὴν καρποφορ(ίαν)
Στεφάνου κ(αὶ) Ἠλία ἀδελφῶν, τήκνα Κομιτίσσα. Ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς τῶν ἁγίον μαρτύρον, πρόσδεξε
τὴν καρποφορίαν Σεργίου κ(αὶ) Προκοπίου τέκνον αὐτοῦ. Ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας Ραβάθας Ἀναστασίας
κ(αὶ) ὑπὲρ ἀναπαύσεως Ἰωάννου Ἀναστασίου κ(αὶ) ὑπὲρ ὧν προσένικεν Κ(ύριο)ς γινόσκι τὼ ὠνόματα.

In the time of the most saintly and most holy Bishop John, this holy place was built and completed by the zeal of the priest and *paramonarios* Baricha, in the month of November, in the time of the sixth (year) of the indiction. God of Saint Lot and of Saint Procopius, accept the offering of the donors Stephanos and Elias, brothers, children of Komitissa. God of the holy martyrs, accept the offering of Sergios and Prokopios, his son. For the salvation of Rabathas, son of Anastasia, and for the repose of John, (son) of Anastasios and for those who donated, whose names God knows.

73 On these formulae, Baumann 1999.
74 On the use of tabulae as authoritative markers of "official" messages, see Mayer i Olivé 2012, 225–6.
75 See Leatherbury 2017a for an expanded discussion.
76 Kawerau and Wiegand 1930, 63–6, pls. XVI–XIX; Dunbabin 1999a, 28–30, with further bibliography. The inscription, now in the Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, reads: Ἡφαιστίων ἐποίει ("Hephaistion made [this mosaic]"). On similar illusionistic *tabulae*, Ehlich 1953; Jones 2014a, 2014b.
77 Encapsulated in the painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasius: Pliny, *Natural History* 35.65–6; on this story, Bryson 1983.
78 On the role of the frame between art and nature, Lebensztejn 1994.
79 See Chapter 2; the main work on the "jeweled style" is Roberts 1989.
80 Mitchell 2004b, 2008, 87–93.
81 The text reads: Ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς / ὧν οἶδεν / ὁ θεὸς τὰ / ὀνόματα. +, "For a vow of those whose names God knows."
82 Pallas 1977, 181–3, no. 89D; Spiro 1978, vol. 1, 186, 188–93, 655; Feissel and Philippidis-Braat 1985, 296–7, no. 38, and 371, no. 137; Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1987a, 77–9, no. 21; Sironen 1997, 327.
83 Numerous early Christian sarcophagi feature carved *tabulae ansatae* or rectangular inscription frames held by winged *putti*. Examples of true *tabulae* held by *putti* on sarcophagi lids include Ulbert and Dresken-Weiland 1998, nos. 20, 63, 123, 187, 367. This iconography is not unique to the early Christian period (several Archaic Greek tombstones feature winged victories holding panels with the names of the deceased, as discussed by Fraser and Rönne 1957), but becomes immensely more popular in late antiquity.
84 The inscription is *CIG* 5.2.169; for further bibliography, see Chapter 2:

Τ̣οῦ σεπτοῦ τούτου τεμένους· ἐν ἱερεῦσειν
ἐννεακαιδέκατος· Θύρσος ὁ ὁσιώ(τατος) ἡγησάμενος
ἀμφοτέρων ἔκρυψεν προσηγορίας πᾶσιν ἐσθλοῖς
καὶ μαρτυρῖ τὰ κτίσματα καὶ λίθου λεπταλέης
εὐσύνθετος κό̣[σ]μ[ος ---].

Thyrsos, both the most holy leader (and) the nineteenth priest of this holy church, eclipsed the offices of all by good things; and as a witness are the buildings and well-arranged decoration of delicate tesserae. . . .

85 The original fourth-century manuscript does not survive, but later manuscripts do, including a seventeenth-century copy of an earlier Carolingian copy of the original, Cod. Barb. lat. 2154 (in this copy, the frontispiece is fol. 197r): Salzman 1992, 25–7, fig. 1; on the prominent monogram of the patron, Valentinus, Garipzanov 2018, 118–22. On Filocalus, Morison 1972, 93–5.

86 The term "martyr" (μάρτυς) of course had powerful undertones for early Christians, signifying the bloody deaths of the faithful at the hands of the persecuting Roman authorities, deaths that acted as "witnesses" to the faith of the true believers. In the context of this inscription, this particular meaning is obscured; though see Avramea 1988, who argues that the church was actually dedicated to the martyred St. Thyrsos, making the church the witness *to* a martyr/witness.

87 On the monumental connotations of the frame, Thomas 2007, 192–4; Leatherbury 2018.

88 Other examples of *tabulae* with holes in their handles include a *tabula* in the sixth-century Basilica Outside-the-Walls at Delphi: Pallas 1977, 20–1, fig. 8; Spiro 1978, 244–5; Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1987a, 194–6, no. 129.

89 *ILCV* 1, nos. 1770–1, *ICUR* 2, 4784: "The faithful mind of Placidia rejoices that the whole splendor of her father's work shines through the zeal of Pope Leo," *Placidiae pia mens operis decus homne paterni / gaudet pontificis studio splendere Leonis*. On the mosaics, also Ihm 1960, 138–40. Interestingly, the split of the text appears choreographed to separate the donor, Placidia, and her father, the emperor Theodosius I, from Pope Leo I, who gets his own half-*tabula*: for more on this text, which was restored after a fire in the nineteenth century, see Leatherbury 2018, with further bibliography. *Tabulae* also framed votive donation inscriptions on the upper walls of the north aisle in the church of Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki: Cormack 1969. Another example from wall mosaics includes, in the catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples, a monumental *tabula* that frames the epitaph of St. Gaudiosus, placed above his tomb: *CIL* 10, 1538; also Sear 1977, 138–40 no. 160, pl. 60, 3.

90 Sukenik 1932.

91 On the texts of the inscriptions, Sukenik 1932, 43–8. The Greek text reads:

> Μνησθῶσιν οἱ τεχ-
> νῖται οἱ κάμνοντ-
> ες τὼ ἔργον τοῦτω
> Μαριανὸς καὶ
> Ἀνινὰς ὑιός.
>
> May the artists who did this work, Marianos and his son Hanina, be remembered!

92 Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 126–9; Balty 1995, 92–3. The *tabulae* frame prayer inscriptions, the first reading:

> Κύριε βοηθός
> γένου ἐν πᾶσι-
> ν Κασσιανοῦ Ἀρ-
> νούβου καὶ ἀ-
> δελφῶν καὶ
> ἰδίων πάντων.
>
> Lord, be helpful in every way to Kassianos (son) of Arnoubos and his brothers and his entire family.

93 Ristow 1998, no. 764. The inscription reads: "For the remembrance, rest and remission of sins of those whose names the Lord knows," + Ὑπὲρ μνήμης καὶ ἀναπαύσεως καὶ ἀφέσεως ἁμαρτιῶν ὧν Κ(ύριο)ς γηνόσκι τὰ ὀν[όματα.]

94 The inscription is now in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem: Avigad 1977; Di Segni 2012, 259–67.
95 Leatherbury 2016a. Three of the symbols appear in the southwest wall, each framed by an architectural structure that resembles a church: Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973, pl. VII, A, and pl. X, A–C.
96 Dahari 1998. A similar schema is used in the floor mosaics of the fifth-century church at ʿEvron, near Nahariyah on the coast of Israel, where a *tabula* frames three crosses-in-circles: Tzaferis 1987, especially 38 fig. 3.
97 There is a pagan equivalent from the votive deposit at Sources de la Seine in Roman Gaul, where *tabulae* frame anatomical images, including depictions of eyes: Deyts 1994, e.g. pl. 53, 5b–c, 6a–b, and pl. 54, 1a–c, 2a–b, 3b–c, etc.
98 On the church in its context within Petra, see McKenzie 1990, 144–7; Fiema 2001, 2002; Erickson-Gini 2010, 195–9.
99 The inscription has a relatively extensive bibliography: see *CIG* 3, 4667, 274–5; Meimaris 1986, 212, no. 1064; *SEG* 39–1671; Meimaris, Kritikakou-Nicolaropoulou, and Bougia 1992, 212–13, no. 193; Haensch 2004. The inscription is very hard to read today, as it has worn away and modern graffiti in Arabic has been written on top of it, and so I rely upon the drawing of Brünnow and von Domaszewski, corrected by Clermont-Ganneau, republished by Piccirillo 1989b:

Ἐπὶ τοῦ ὁσιωτάτου
Ἰάσωνος ἐπισκό-
που Θ(εο)ῦ χάριτι ἡγι-
άσθη ὁ τοπὸς τῇ
ε΄ Λῴου τοῦ Ἔ(τους) τμα΄
παρόντος νουμέ-
ρου τῶν γενναιο-
τάτω<ν> [Τερτιοδαλμα]-
τ[ῶ]ν καὶ Ἰουλιανοῦ ὑι-
ακόνου ΑΠ.ΝΙΑΣ, +
Χ(ριστοῦ) σώζοντ[ος ---].

100 According to a carved epitaph, Jason and his son, Dionysius, a deacon "of the Great Church of Jerusalem" (who speaks in the first person), were buried in the church, the former under the "altar of holy objects" (τράπεζαν ἁγιοφόρον), either the main altar or one of the two subsidiary reliquary tables installed in the two side apses: Meimaris, Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, and Bougia 1992, 213, no. 194; Sartre 1993, 97–100, no. 63; *SEG* 44–1377.
101 Belmonte, Gonzalez-Garcia, and Polcaro 2013, 487–501.
102 These include the Chapel of Aaron and the main church on Jebel Haroun, discussed in Chapter 2: Frösén, Sironen, and Fiema 2008, 273–80, figs. 49–53.
103 "Those who look towards him are radiant, and their faces are never covered with shame": Piccirillo 1987, especially 216–17, pl. 25, photo 35; Piccirillo and Alliata 1994, 263–4, no. 21, tav. 26,5; Felle 2006, 79 no. 82.
104 Fowden 2004, 178, 190–1, with previous bibliography; also Imbert 2015 [2016], discussion at 336–9.
105 On other early Umayyad borrowings of the *tabula*, Fowden 2004, 178 n. 4. Later Islamic examples include a stone *tabula* in the interior of the Bab al-Jabiya in Damascus whose inscription records the construction of the gate of Nur al-Din in 1164: Byron and Cohen et al. 1937, 41, no. 3262; also Burns 2017, 156; and the foundation inscription of Dar al-Hadith al-Ashrafiyya in Damascus, built by the Ayyubid prince Al-Ashraf Musa in 1229–1237: Eastmond 2017, 182–3, with further bibliography.
106 For more on the circle-as-*kosmos*, see Chapter 4.
107 See the discussion in Chapter 4.

108 For an extended discussion, see Chapter 5; though the Church of the Apostles inscription at Madaba does feature the pairing of a prayer with an evocation of both the "pagan" and the Christian *kosmos*: the text runs around an image of the personification of the sea (*Thalassa*), while the text refers to God as "Lord God, maker of heaven and earth."

109 This shield-as-text-frame was popularized in Rome in the first century CE by Augustus, whose golden honorific shield inscribed with imperial virtues of clemency (*clementias*), piety (*pietas*), and righteousness (*iustitia*) was displayed in the Curia (preserved as a fragmentary inscription, *CIL* 9, 5811): Ryberg 1966; Wallace-Hadrill 1981; Zanker 1988, 95–7; Galinsky 1996, 80–90; Hurlet 2015, especially 195–6.

110 Lehmann-Hartleben 1926; Rossi 1971; Gauer 1977, 25; Brilliant 1986, 90–108; Lepper and Frere 1988, 121, pl. LVII; Galinier 2007, 85–8.

111 Kiilerich 2011, 48.

112 Kiilerich 2011, 48, 49 fig. 2, points out the decreasing size of the letters as one reads the lines from the top, a common feature of Roman monumental public inscriptions. This pavement also features *imagines clipeatae* of donors: Kähler 1962; Brusin 1968; Menis 1971, 21–6; Caillet 2011, especially 165.

113 Translation adapted from that of Wataghin 1992, 362, n. 81; the Latin text is *ILCV* 1, no. 1863; Caillet 1993, 136–9, cat. 21, 4, with further bibliography:

> *Theodore feli̯[x]*
> *[a]diuuante Deo*
> *omnipotente et*
> *po̯emnio caelitus tibi*
> *[tra]ditum, omnia*
> *[b]aeate fecisti et*
> *gloriose dedicas-*
> *ti*.

114 The inscription is *CIL* 13, 6796. The scabbard with its sword, also called the "Sword of Tiberius," is in the British Museum, BM 1866,0806.1; on its decoration, which also features a second inscribed *clipeus* held by the goddess Victory ("of [Divus] Augustus"): Koortbojian 2006, especially 197–200; Noreña 2011, 160–1.

115 Another example of a similar *clipeus*-like circle frames the dedicatory inscription of the mosaic pavement of a hermitage at the Siyagha monastery in Jordan, dated to the late fifth or early sixth century: Piccirillo 1989a, 170–4; Piccirillo and Alliata 1990, especially 398–400, 405, fig. 23; Piccirillo 1993, 193; *SEG* 40–1537; Di Segni in Piccirillo and Alliata 1998, especially 438–9, no. 35.

116 "In the time of the most holy bishop Sergios, this church was completed in the month of Desios, the seventh (year) of the indiction," + Ἐπὶ + / Σεργίου τοῦ ὁ/σιω(τάτου) ἐπισκ(όπου) ἐτε/λιώθη ὁ ναὸς οὗ/τος ἐν μηνὶ Δε/σίου ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) / + ζ΄+: Bujard, with Piccirillo and Poiatti-Haldimann 1992, especially 219, no. 71; Piccirillo 1993, 236. A similar *clipeus* frames an inscription in the church at Nebha, dated to 557 CE: Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 399 fig. 386.

117 "In the good times of our Lord, the most holy and most blessed Sergios, our bishop, the whole work of the most holy church was decorated with mosaic by the zeal and care of Procopius, priest, in the month of Gorpiaios, the sixth year of the indiction, and in the year 482 of the province of Arabia [587/588 CE]," Ἐν τοῖς / ἀγαθοῖς χρόνοις / τοῦ δεσπότου ἡμῶν / τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου κ(αὶ) μακαριω(τάτου) / Σεργίου ἡμῶν ἐπισκόπου / ἐψηφώθη τὸ πᾶν ἔργον / τῆς ἁγιωτ(άτης) ἐκλσίας / σπουδῇ κ(αὶ) ἐπιμελίᾳ / Προκοπίου πρεσβ(υτέρου) / μηνὶ Γορπιαίου ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) / ς΄ κ(αὶ) ἐν / ἔτους τῆς ἐ/παρχ(ίας) Ἀραβ(ίας) υπβ΄: Piccirillo 1989a, 280–2, 1993, 234–5; also *SEG* 37–1600 (entrance inscription). The stepped pattern as "rim" decoration is also used in secular contexts, as in a *clipeus*-framed inscription in a civic complex along the *cardo* in Gerasa, which informs the viewer that the place "of the venerable Blues" was decorated with mosaic

in 578, within a decade of the decoration of the Church of Sergius: Piccirillo 1993, 284 fig. 524. Also, the *clipeus* in the narthex of the church at ʿEvron in Israel, dated to 490 CE: Tzaferis 1987, 45, no. 8, fig. 11.

118 See Chapter 6.

119 The text is fragmentary: Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 48; *SEG* 40–1521b. Other examples of the same kind of frame include a *clipeus* framing a dedicatory inscription in the northern aisle of the sixth-century Church A at Magen: Tzaferis 1985; and a seventh- or eighth-century dedicatory inscription in the western wing of the Monastery of Theodore and Kyriakos on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem: Amit, Seligman, and Zilberbod 2003; Di Segni 2003a, 250–1; Di Segni 2003b, 149–51. Acanthus leaves were another Roman motif whose popularity continued in the late antique period, and were used to decorate inscription frames of many different shapes, including the square-framed martyrs' inscription in the basilica at Henchir Chigarnia (Uppenna) in Tunisia: Yasin 2009, 176–80, fig. 4.18, with previous bibliography. Similar frames were also used for texts inscribed on consular diptychs, including on the diptychs of Justinian I, issued in 521 before he became emperor, where the central dedicatory inscription is framed by a lotus-rimmed *clipeus* in the center of each leaf: Volbach 1952, 38–9, nos. 25–7, pl. 12–13; Delbrueck 1929, 141–3, N26–8.

120 The stele dates to the second century CE and is in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, MMA acc. no. 59.11.19; von Bothmer 1961, 181–2, fig. 1. Though it dates to the Roman period, it testifies to a much older set of Greek traditions.

121 This practice is described by Pliny, *Natural History* 16.3, 5; see Maxfield 1981, 70–4.

122 For example, the emperor Claudius is depicted wearing the *corona civica* in a larger-than-life size statue in the Vatican Museums (Inv. 243), in which he also bears the attributes of Jupiter: Lippold 1936, 137–40, cat. 550.

123 This act is depicted on the southeast side of the base of the Obelisk of Theodosius in Constantinople (c. 390), where the emperor stands in his box and extends a wreath downwards with his right hand: Bruns 1935, 61–8, Abb. 77; Kiilerich 1998, 55–7; on the obelisk itself, Bassett 2004, 219–22, no. 138. Wreaths are also held by charioteers on their tombstones and on honorific monuments, including the column bases of the charioteer Porphyrius, which were erected in the Hippodrome around 500: Alan Cameron 1973, 17–28, pl. 1.

124 ὑγι(εί)αν / Ἡρακλείδη / τῷ κτίστη / κὲ τοῖς λουομέ/νοις πᾶσι: Weber 2002, 144, 302–3 no. 48a, Taf. 98B–C. The second inscription (Weber 2002, no. 48b) is nearly identical but lacks the final πᾶσι. On the Gadara baths, Piccirillo 1993, 328, figs. 685–6.

125 Hachlili 2009, 199–200, 202 fig. IX – 5. Even larger wreath frames can be found in the synagogues at Hammat Gader and Sepphoris, flanked by lions: e.g. Hachlili 2009, 20 fig. II–7, 200 fig. IX–1.

126 Fine 2005a, 108–9. Other wreaths, for example the one in the pavement of the synagogue at Huseifa, are also framed by Jewish ritual objects including *menorot*: Hachlili 2009, 202 fig. IX–4.

127 Stern 2010, especially 487–9, 494, who points out that both the Greek and (even smaller) Aramaic inscriptions would have been difficult to read because of their placement.

128 Fine 2005a, 108, who also points out references to wreaths in the liturgy of the late antique synagogue; also Hachlili 2009, 200–1, figs. IX–1, 2.

129 In Jordan, the funerary chapel at Khirbat Munyah-ʿAsfur in Arabia features a dedicatory inscription framed in an abstracted wreath whose border, decorated with variants of the rainbow pattern, retains the jewels common on martyrs' crowns: Piccirillo 1989a, 112–13, 1993, 299, fig. 587.

130 Prudentius, *Crowns of the Martyrs* 2.549–56, Thomson 1953, 141, with adaptations:

> *Sic, sancte Laurenti, tuam*
> *nos passionem quaerimus:*

est aula nam duplex tibi,
hic corporis, mentis polo.
illic inenarrabili
allectus urbi municeps
aeternae in arce curiae
gestas coronam civicam.

131 See O'Hogan 2016, 91–4.
132 On depictions of martyrs' crowns generally, Grabar 1968, 41–3.
133 On the chapel and its mosaics, Mackie 1995, 2002, 116–29. On late fourth- and fifth-century Milan in general, McLynn 1994.
134 On these oddly shaped crosses, the second of which may also be in the shape of a cryptogram for Christ's name, as well as the two enigmatic words inscribed inside the crosses, Mackie 2003, 121–5; on the Chi-Rho as powerful symbol in the period, Squire and Whitton 2017.
135 Revelation 20:11–15; see Mackie 1995, 2002, 116–28, who also points out the play on words inherent in the saint's name: the saint, Victor, is a *victor*, as he has triumphed over death through martyrdom. On the literary image of the "heavenly book," already present in Paul's letters (e.g. Philippians 4:3), Baynes 2012.
136 On North African Christianity in particular, Burns and Jensen 2014. Devotion to local martyrs was energized by the intense sectarian conflicts between different groups of Christians: see Tilley 1996; Shaw 2011.
137 *XI k(alendas) Ian(uarias) memoria sanctorum Heracli, Donati, Zebbocis, Secundiani, Victoriani, Publiciae, Meggenis*: Février 1968, 189–90; Christern 1976, 112, 126–7; Yasin 2009, 162–3, fig. 4.6.
138 Février 1968, 189–90; Yasin 2009, 163.
139 Gauckler 1910, 237–41, nos. 707–8, who associates the chapel with a monastery dedicated to St. Stephen, the saint whose name appears in the central wreath (*Istefanus*); Duval 1972, especially 1096–8; Bairam-Ben Osman and Ennabli 1982, especially 13–14.
140 Τὰ μαρ/τύρία σου / ἐπιστώθη/σαν σφό/δρα τῷ οἴ/κῳ σου πρ(έπει) <ἁγίασμα>: Reynolds 1980, 147, cat. C III, pl. 106,2.
141 On the mosaics, most recently Chick 2014a; also Chick 2014b.
142 The same term is used for the shrines of martyrs, as in a sixth-century papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, POxy.941.4: Grenfell and Hunt 1908, 310–11.
143 On these poems, see Chapter 2. Among the ever-growing bibliography on different kinds of figured poems, of late focused on Optatian, Adler and Ernst 1987, 21–34; Ernst 1991; Luz 2010; Squire 2011, 231–5; Pappas 2011, 2012; Squire 2015a, 2017a, 2017b; Squire and Whitton 2017; Squire and Wienand 2017.
144 Elkins 1999, 105–15.
145 Russell 1987, 53–60; Campbell 1998, 23, fig. 25.
146 For example, a flask in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York decorated with an image of the Adoration of the Magi, MMA Cloisters Collection 1984.196: see Evans, Holcomb, and Hallman 2001, 23. A similarly shaped ewer is depicted with handles on the sixth-century Riha Paten from Syria, now in Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC, acc. no. BZ 1924.5: Ross 1962, cat. no. 10; Schrader 1977, 611–12, cat. no. 547, color pl. xvi; Mundell Mango 1986, cat. no. 35; and more recently, Cormack and Vassilaki 2008, no. 20.
147 On *kantharoi,* see for example Mitchell 2008, 75; Hachlili 2009, 139–40, who refers to the forms as amphorae despite their lack of the simple and streamlined forms of ancient amphorae used to transport wine and oil.
148 Russell 1987, 53–60; Campbell 1998, 23.
149 On the terminology of pattern prose, Higgins 1987, 187–90 (on "shaped prose").
150 See *supra* n. 143.

151 Higgins 1987, 6. On the role of mental and physical images in memory processes, including the line layouts of texts, Carruthers 1990, 10, 56–98; Small 1997.
152 House VII 16, 15: see Curtis 1984; Bragantini, De Vos, and Badoni 1986, 243–4; Dunbabin 1999a, 319, fig. 315.
153 Vessels, especially *kantharoi*, were often depicted in Christian floor mosaics with vines springing up out of them: see, for example, Mitchell 2008, 75; Hachlili 2009, 139–40.
154 For the forms of such vessels, Mundell Mango 1986.
155 Seyrig 1958, 35–6, no. 39; Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 117–19. The inscription read:

Ἐπὶ Βαρβεούσου
πρεσβυτέρου
καὶ Θαλασίου
καὶ Μαρίνου
καὶ Δίου
διακόνων
ἔτους.Ψ.Θεόδωρος.Μαραω[---]
Διογένης.Μαρῖνος.Μόκι[μος ---]
Σιγνώνης.Μαρκελλῖν[ος ---]
δεκάπρωτοι – ἰνδικτιῶν[ος Β ---]
νης καὶ Μαρκέλλος τεσε[ράριοι ---]
ἐν Χριστῷ
ἐψηφολό-
γησαν τα[ύ]-
την τὴν
τάβλα·
Χριστὲ βοήθι.

156 Peers 2004, 13–34; recently, Jensen 2017; Garipzanov 2018, 81–105.
157 Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005, 296–7, 314–7, nos. 205, 225, 227, photo pl. XLI, color pl. XII.
158 The cross is in the Sammlung C.S. in Munich, inv. no. 2838: Fourlas and Tsamakda 2011, cat. III.5.9.
159 For an overview of crosses inscribed and plain, as well as the function of inscriptions on processional crosses to replace images, Dodd 1984. The famous Antioch Cross, now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, is inscribed with the Trisagion hymn: Mundell Mango 1986, no. 42, with earlier bibliography. Four crosses from the Hama Treasure are also inscribed, now in the Walters Art Gallery and the Toledo Museum of Art: Mundell Mango 1986, nos. 7, 9–10, 67. For crosses with archaeological contexts, including a cross with an Armenian inscription found during excavations at Divrigi and now in Istanbul; as well as another cross with a Greek inscription, possibly from Asia Minor, now in the collection of George Ortiz: Dodd 1984.
160 On processional crosses generally, Cotsonis 1994.
161 Piccirillo 1993, 366; Politis 2012, 175–7.
162 On the formula, Leclercq 1939. Examples of the inscription on jewelry include a sixth-century cross in the Museo Civico Archeologico in Milan (inv. A A0.9.6469), and a similar cross now in Dumbarton Oaks: Ross, Zwirn, and Boyd 2005, 136, no. 179H, pl. XCVII. A textile roundel in the Brooklyn Museum bears the same cross-text: Brooklyn Museum acc. no. 15.440. Mosaic examples include inscriptions in pavement of the two side apses of the sixth-century baptistery at Hippos/Susita: Yeivin 1955; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 136, no. 231, pl. CLXX, with previous bibliography. Another example appears in the pavement of a monastic cell at Wadi el-Qilt (Choziba), Patrich 1990, 214–16, fig. 14.
163 Vine scrolls and lambs appear together on many other mosaic pavements and in the apses of churches in Ravenna and Rome as well as on early Christian sarcophagi, as

on the front of a sarcophagus now in Narni, Italy, where two lambs flank a jeweled cross under which runs an ivy vine: Ulbert and Dresken-Weiland 1998, no. 282.

164 Another group of "object" frames, which seem to have had a magical significance connected to the idea of stamping or impressing, take the form of geometric shapes (hexagons, octagons) or of letters, found on bread stamps as well as on mosaic pavements: on these, Leatherbury Forthcoming B.

165 E.g. an inscribed prayer carved onto the rocks along the pilgrim route to Mount Sinai, which is framed by a large colonnade: Negev 1971, 185, fig. 2.

166 For example, on a sarcophagus from Salona in Croatia: Ulbert and Dresken-Weiland 1998, no. 298, pl. 98, 1–4.

167 While the Khirbet Mukhayyat frame is unique, buildings (usually churches) often appear on late antique church pavements: Duval 2003b.

168 Piccirillo 1993, 178; Di Segni in Piccirillo and Alliata 1998, 439–40, nos. 36a–c.

169 Di Segni in Piccirillo and Alliata 1998, 439–40, nos. 36a–c.

170 On these "Temple" frames, from a large bibliography, see Hachlili 1998, 272–9; Talgam 2013, 222–48.

171 Sukenik 1932, 22–34.

172 On architectural frames in Roman art, see the essays in Platt and Squire 2017a.

173 Rosen-Ayalon 1976, who dates the pavement to the Umayyad period; Avner 2008, who dates the pavement to the Abbasid period; also Talgam 2014, 422–4, who sees the mosaic as connected to the tradition of architectural façades in synagogue mosaics.

174 Rosen-Ayalon 1976, 117–18.

Plate 1 Mosaic floor with images of Alexandria and Memphis, Church of Ss. Peter and Paul, Gerasa, c. 540 CE, Yale University Art Gallery 1932.1735

Source: Photograph © Yale University Art Gallery

Plate 2 Neonian (“Orthodox”) Baptistery, Ravenna, c. 400

Source: Photograph by author

Plate 3 Detail of gold mosaic inscription, Neonian ("Orthodox") Baptistery, Ravenna

Source: Photograph by author

Plate 4 Mosaic dedication, Church of St. George, Khirbat al-Samra, Jordan, 637

Source: Courtesy of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, Mount Nebo, and the American Center of Oriental Research, Amman

Plate 5 Electoral graffiti from the façade of the Thermopolium of Asselina (IX.11, Pompeii)

Source: Photograph by Plaàtarte, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 unported license

Plate 6 Painted lintel inscription, South Church at Shivta, Israel, now in the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum, Jerusalem, fifth or sixth century

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Plate 7 Red tile dedications from the exterior walls, Church of the Forty Martyrs, Saranda, Albania, fifth century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of John Mitchell

Plate 8 Mosaic dedication, pavement of the Church of the Priest Wa'il, Umm al-Rasas, Jordan, 586

Source: Courtesy of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, Mount Nebo, and the American Center of Oriental Research, Amman

Plate 9 Mosaic dedication, pavement of the baptistery, church at Kursi, Golan Heights, late sixth century

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

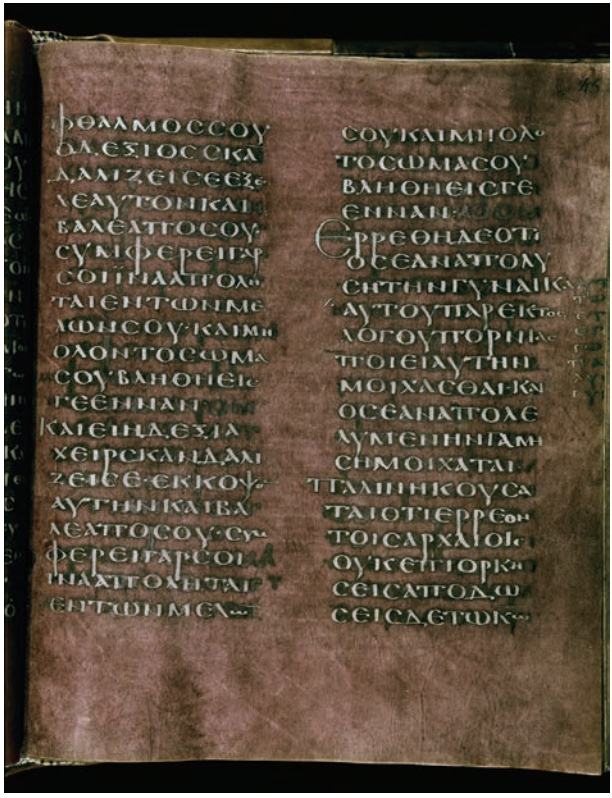

Plate 10 Folio 45r (from the Gospel of Matthew) with silver lettering on purple parchment, Rossano Gospels, sixth century, now in the Biblioteca Arcivescovile, Rossano

Source: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Plate 11 Mosaic dedication of Eupithis, pavement of the synagogue at Apamea, Syria, fourth century, now in the National Museum, Damascus

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Plate 12 Theodoulos inscription, Sousse, Tunisia, fifth to mid-sixth century, now in the Sousse Museum

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Plate 13 *Pax et Concordia* inscription, pavement of the Christian cemetery at Tipasa, Algeria, mid-fourth century

Source: Photograph by Robin M. Jensen

Plate 14 Mosaic epitaph of Hermes, pavement of the catacomb of Hermes, Sousse, Tunisia, fourth century, now in Sousse Museum

Source: © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY

Plate 15 Mosaic epitaph of Donata, pavement of the church at Pupput, Tunisia, fifth century

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Plate 16 Mosaic dedication, pavement of the Basilica of St. Paul, Philippi, Greece, early fourth century

Source: Photograph by Marsyas, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 unported license

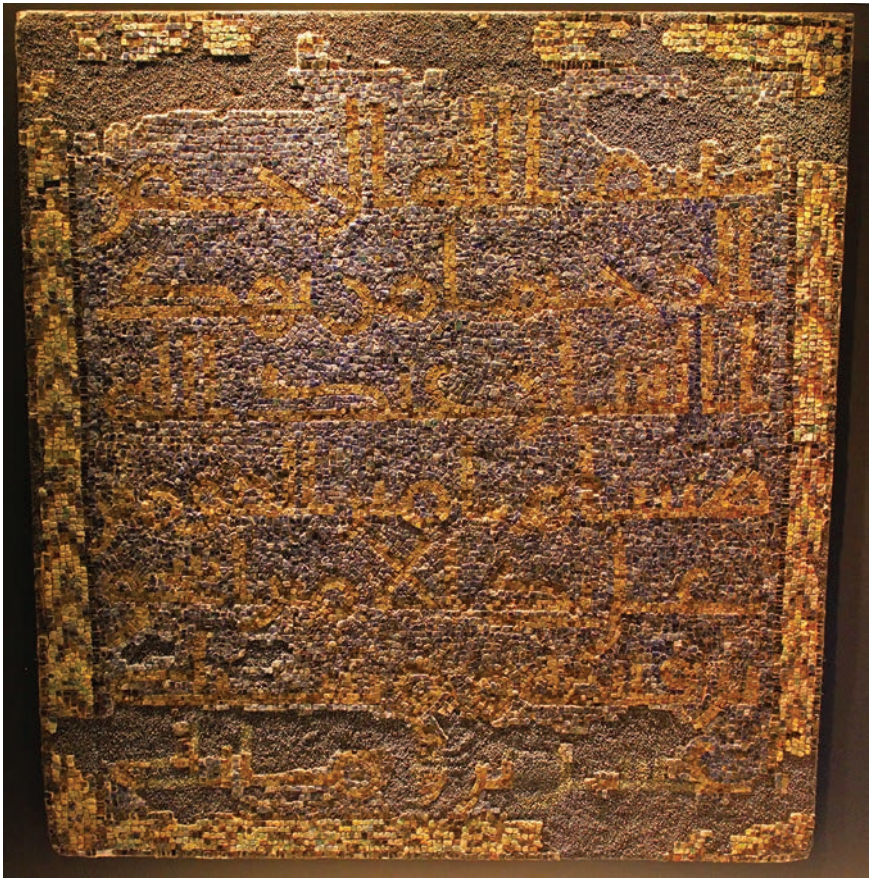

Plate 17 Detail of mosaic inscription, Hisham's Market, Beth Shean, Israel, c. 738, now in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Plate 18 Detail, apse mosaic inscription of Santi Cosma e Damiano, Rome, c. 526–530

Source: Photograph by author

Plate 19 Apse mosaic inscription, Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, Rome, c. 625–638

Source: Photograph by author

Plate 20 Mosaic dedication, pavement of the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius, Khirbet Mukhayyat (Mount Nebo), Jordan, 557/558

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Plate 21 Mosaic inscription, pavement of a church at Hir esh-Sheikh, Syria, fifth century, now in the Maʿarat al-Nuʿman Mosaic Museum

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Plate 22 Inscription (below the scene of the caliph reclining), end wall of west aisle, main hall, Qusayr ʿAmra, before 743

Source: Agnieszka Szymanska/Manar al-Athar

Plate 23 Mosaic of the south chapel pavement with inscription ("A house flashing . . ."), Basilica of St. Demetrios, Nikopolis (near modern Preveza), Greece, second half of the sixth century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Dan Diffendale

Plate 24 Mosaic of the north transept pavement, Basilica of St. Demetrios, Nikopolis (near modern Preveza), Greece

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Dan Diffendale

Plate 25 Detail, mosaic inscription of the north transept with quotation of Homer's *Odyssey* in line three ("everything that breathes and creeps"), Basilica of St. Demetrios, Nikopolis (near modern Preveza, Greece)

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Helen Miles

Plate 26 Apse mosaic (with dedication inscription below), Hosios David (Latomou Monastery), Thessaloniki, Greece, c. 540

Source: HIP/Art Resource/NY

Plate 27 Detail, left-hand portion of the Madaba Map, pavement of the modern Church of St. George, Madaba, Jordan, mid-sixth century

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Plate 28 Detail, right-hand portion of the Madaba Map with the city of Beersheba (on the left side of the image, above Gerara)

Source: Tiffany Chezum/Manar al-Athar

Plate 29 Detail, area around Jerusalem, Madaba Map

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Plate 30 Church of the Virgin, Madaba, Jordan, renovated 767

Source: Photograph by author

4 Ekphrasis and experience

Upon walking into the Basilica of St. Demetrios at Nikopolis, near the modern city of Preveza on the western coast of Greece, the sixth-century viewer would have been confronted with numerous images and texts in mosaic (Figure 4.1).[1] While we do not know what appeared on the walls of the church, the floor mosaics act as a rich window into the complicated interaction between texts, images, and interiors in the period. Adopting the most basic visual presentation strategy available to them, the mosaicists laid the inscriptions in the floor in black stone tesserae, arranged in neat rows within their frames.

At the entrance to the nave of the church, a dedication inscription ("Dedication 1" on the plan) is framed by a particular type of Roman frame called the *tabula ansata*, the "tablet-with-handles," a form we encountered in the previous chapter. Praising the patron of the church, the bishop Dometios, it begins by using the language of light to describe the brilliance of the interior: "A stone flashing from God's grace here and there" (Λίθον ἀπαστράπτοντα Θ(εο)ῦ χάριν ἔνθα κ(αὶ) ἔνθα).[2] But to what stone does this inscription refer? A clue comes in the form of a second inscription nearby ("Dedication 2"), at the entrance to a small chapel off the south side of the narthex of the church, which features a nearly identical first line, except that in this second text, the "stone" has been replaced by "house" (οἶκον): "A house flashing from God's grace here and there" **(Color Plate 23)**.[3] This replacement makes sense if one reads "stone" as a synecdoche for "wall" (τεῖχος), or indeed for the entire "house," encouraging the viewer to think of the "house" of worship as a glittering space, a reading strengthened by the reference to the "stone" (λίθον) materials of the mosaic inscription itself, whose position in space is emphasized by the use of the repeated deictics: "here," "there" (ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα). The "stone" and the "house" are "flashing," a word derived from the verb ἀστράπτω, "flash" or "lighten," which is frequently used to describe the brilliance of Christ's miraculous appearances in the New Testament.[4] The language of this text, however, does not derive strictly from the Christian tradition, and in fact bears many similarities with the visionary language used by Roman and late antique authors to describe the shine and glitter associated with the divine and with brilliant materials such as jewels,[5] a "flash" often used to dramatic effect by the influential poet Nonnus.[6] The fascination with the movement of light back and

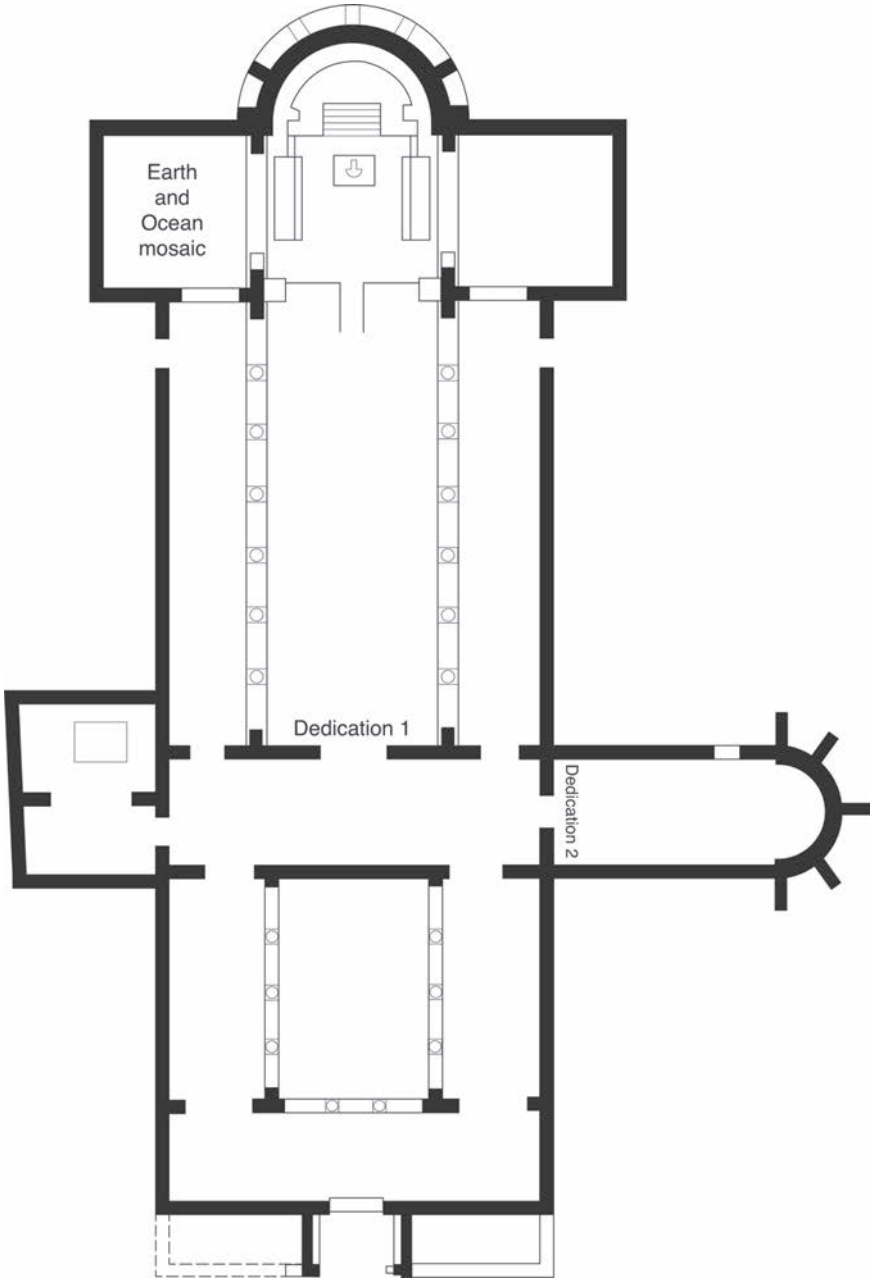

Figure 4.1 Plan, Basilica of St. Demetrios, Nikopolis (near modern Preveza), Greece
Source: Plan by Alison Wilkins, after Kitzinger 1976, fig. 14

forth, "here and there," would have allowed readers to share in the amazement of the "speaker" of the inscription,[7] encouraging them to use the light-filled church as a place to contemplate sacred visions of Christ and the saints.

As they moved further into the church, viewers would have left behind the light-filled texts of the entrance and encountered other images. In the pavement of the north transept of the church, a mosaic depicts a paradisiacal landscape lush with fruit and cypress trees, flowering plants, and birds seen walking along the ground and flying in the air **(Color Plates 24 and 25)**. Around the panel, framed by multiple borders, runs a wide zone containing a marine scene of fish, birds, and aquatic plants, as well as vignettes in which nude fishermen sit on a rock or stand in order to harpoon fish.[8] The iconography of the main landscape panel and its marine frame is not unique in late antique art, but the verse inscription, framed by another *tabula ansata* immediately below the ground line of the panel, is unusual among surviving inscriptions.[9] The text reads:

+ Ὠκεανὸν περίφαντον ἀπίριτον ἔνθα δέδορκας
γαῖαν μέσσον ἔχοντα σοφοῖς ἰνδάλμασι τέχνης
πάντα πέριξ φορέουσαν ὅσα πνίει τε καὶ ἕρπει·
Δουμετίου κτέανον μεγαθύμου ἀρχιερῆος.

+ Here you see clearly the famous and boundless ocean
carrying in the middle the earth,
bearing round about by means of the skillful forms of art everything that
breathes and creeps;
the property of Dometios, the generous archpriest.[10]

While this text is technically a dedicatory inscription, since it labels the church as the "property" of the generous patron, the archbishop Dometios, it is much more than that. In three of its four lines, the inscription describes the images that surround the text that "you [the viewer] see": the earth immediately above, and the ocean the marine border around. Ernst Kitzinger and Henry Maguire have noted the apparent disconnect between the short but florid epigram, which uses phrases and epithets drawn from Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in its third and fourth lines (πάντα ὅσα πνίει τε καὶ ἕρπει, "everything that breathes and creeps," and μεγάθυμος, "generous"), and the sparser, more formulaic iconography of the mosaic.[11] However, this text is in fact much more complicated than commentators have recognized. While others have noted its Homeric quotations and meter (hexameter), as well as the influence of the poet Nonnus,[12] which must have made the patron's erudition (*paideia*) explicit to those who recognized the references, not enough attention has been paid to its character as an ekphrastic text.[13]

In classical antiquity, an ekphrasis, often translated generically as "description," was a speech or a text that "brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes."[14] Even in late antiquity, ekphrasis was one of the standard techniques taught during rhetorical training in the schools attended by those young men whose families could afford it.[15] Many ekphraseis (the plural of ekphrasis) were about buildings or

works of art, as these lent themselves to verbal flights of fancy, enabling speakers to paint dense verbal pictures of visual images and thus to demonstrate their rhetorical skill in order to earn fame and fortune.[16] The composition of an ekphrasis was a particular kind of exercise with its own rules: the goal was not to deliver an "accurate" description, at least as we would consider it today, but rather to evoke the scene depicted with vividness (*enargeia*), making the audience feel as if they were looking at the artwork, building, or event described.[17] The numerous tropes or themes (*topoi*) that recur in ekphraseis, some of which we will discuss shortly, were popular and powerful not necessarily because they were objectively true in relation to the thing described, but because they were familiar devices that helped listeners or readers create mental pictures more effectively.[18]

Inside the church at Nikopolis, readers who had some knowledge of the techniques of ekphrasis would have recognized how text and image played off of each other: for them, the "reduced" image could symbolize the whole earth and all its creatures. Even those who could not read the whole text, or who missed the Homeric references, likely would have been accustomed to hearing similar ekphraseis of images or events in sermons or public speeches, allowing them to knit text and image together. But the Nikopolis text is even more complicated in terms of its referentiality: it is a late antique ekphrasis in a Christian context that explicitly harkens back to the most famous ekphrasis of antiquity, Homer's description of the golden, god-forged shield of Achilles in Book 18 of the *Iliad*.[19] This text, which has spurred many books and articles over the last few decades, is too long to quote in full here, but what is significant is that this *ur*-ekphrasis of the decoration of Achilles's shield also features "the earth . . . on it the heavens; on it the sea."[20] The combination of earth and sea was popular as a symbolic image of the universe (*kosmos*), as well as a symbol for the poetry of Homer itself, whose verse was said to have been drawn from as deep a well as the ocean.[21] In the Roman world, the earth-ocean *topos* gained an imperial spin, and emperors were frequently paired with personifications of earth and ocean in order to signify the extent of their rule.[22] As an acclamation by itself, "Ocean!" (ὠκεανὲ) came to signify lavishness in the late antique period.[23] Audiences at Nikopolis may have been aware of all or only some of these connections: perhaps they knew their Homer well, and saw Dometios himself as a creative figure who inspired the "skilful images of art" on the floor (σοφοῖς ἰνδάλμασι τέχνης); or, in a more explicitly Christian interpretation, they may have turned their thoughts to God (rather than the emperor), whom they considered the true Lord of earth and ocean.[24] This latter reading converted the church into a microcosm of the Christian universe, enhancing the sacred character of the interior.[25] These receptions were not mutually exclusive, nor did they exclude others, as late antique viewers were accustomed to the multivalency of images and texts.[26]

Because the Nikopolis inscription is written in verse, and because it draws on rhetorical tropes commonly found in works of ekphrasis, we might call it an ekphrastic epigram.[27] Besides the intertextual references to Homeric works and the use of the "earth and ocean" theme, these rhetorical techniques include direct address to the viewer/reader/listener ("you see clearly," δέδορκας), inclusion of a

deictic marker that places the reader ("here," ἔνθα), and play with the simultaneously visual and verbal nature of the decorative program (the mosaic text as well as the images are "skillful forms of art," σοφοῖς ἰνδάλμασι τέχνης, a playful turn of phrase that Roman authors, including Philostratus the Elder, employ).[28] This play between the verbal and the visual was not unique to the Nikopolis inscription: as Gianfranco Agosti and others have demonstrated, late antique poets were deeply engaged with the visual in both longer ekphrasis and in epigram.[29] But although the words of the Nikopolis inscription play with ideas about the visual, we must also remember that this text and others like it were not only texts: they were written into the physical fabric of church interiors, and were read and viewed by clergymen and worshippers as they entered, walked around, and participated in rituals in buildings.[30] The tropes used by the inscription, often dismissed by scholars as formulaic requirements of ekphrasis, here worked as cues, leading readers on a journey around the building and triggering certain responses to spaces as well as images.[31] The abilities of inscriptions to explicate, play, and encourage movement – of the eyes, the body, and the mind – was not unique to late antiquity, but these appear to have been utilized more widely in sacred spaces in the period, indicating a particular taste for reading texts in motion. While we cannot take the inscriptions themselves as evidence for actual period responses – they are in fact imagined responses rather than specific individualized reactions to spaces and images – they allow us to access the spectrum of potential receptions of texts and the interiors in which they were placed.[32]

This chapter examines the ways in which late antique inscriptions like that at Nikopolis, especially those from Christian contexts, adopted and employed the verbal-visual strategies of ekphrasis. As a type of speech or text, ekphraseis of artworks or buildings were grounded in both the physical experience and mental visualization of architectural space. First, we turn to the circumstances of performed ekphraseis and to the contexts of viewer/reader response, focusing on the famous sixth-century description of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople by Paul the Silentiary, a description that was performed in a building adjacent to the church itself. Second, the chapter analyzes inscriptions that make use of the components of ekphrasis to encourage readers to move through and around spaces, often asking them to move in circles around interiors, walking in paths that echo the centralized, circular architecture of some early Byzantine churches. All of the rhetorical techniques employed by these inscriptions had classical precedents, but many of the texts adapt them for their new role in churches. While inscribed texts in both sacred and secular buildings encourage similar types of movement, epigrams and prose inscriptions from Christian contexts advocate a particular kind of active viewing grounded in ritual and the experience of the sacred. Third, we turn to texts that advocate responses to images and experiences within the church building, inscriptions that perform a range of possible responses and ask readers to consider, embrace, or react to these ideal responses. Finally, we examine the rich use of voice in inscriptions, texts which take on the voice of the patron or of the building itself, placing readers in certain roles in order to get them thinking about the function of images or spaces. By re-placing inscribed texts in their contexts,

and considering the texts as they themselves desired to be read, performed, and responded to, we see that late antique sacred spaces were not static spaces where captive congregations were preached at, but instead were active sites of viewing as well as of movement, discussion, and debate.

Ekphrasis on the move

In late antiquity, audiences heard ekphraseis performed in or near the buildings being described, read the texts of such performances, or read related descriptive passages in literary works.[33] From the sixth century alone, a number of texts of performed ekphraseis survive. These include Chorikios of Gaza's two speeches (*encomia*) given in praise of the bishop Marcian, which perform rhetorical "trials" to demonstrate that Marcian's churches in Gaza are among the wonders of the world,[34] and Paul the Silentiary's description of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Figure 4.2), commemorating the repair of the church's dome in the early 560s.[35] These compositions preserve the popular tropes of Greek and Roman ekphrasis: expressions of indescribability and innumerability (*aporia*), often used to praise the patron of the building;[36] wonder or amazement (*thauma*) at grand interiors; and an emphasis on motion, both in terms of visions of interiors and of narrative artworks, all of which combine to allow listeners or readers to create vivid mental images of the buildings described.[37] Chorikios, Paul, and others used the rhetorical tools of ekphrasis to heap praise on the patrons of these buildings (who also happened to be their patrons), as did the inscription from Nikopolis, the last line of which effectively acted as a kind of credit line for the work (the building is "the property of Dometios").[38]

One of the most important components of ekphrasis was the emphasis on motion, typically evoked by the narrator's rhetorical movement around the building as (s)he led the audience on a tour (*periegesis*) of the interior.[39] This emphasis is very clear in Paul's description of Hagia Sophia, delivered in the nearby patriarchate after the second consecration of the church in 562 or 563.[40] After praising Justinian's renovation of the massive dome of the church, which had collapsed in the late 550s, Paul begins his ekphrasis by re-performing his entry into the building: "Unbar the door to me, god-fearing people, unbar it, initiates, unbar the shrine of divine wonder to my tale."[41] Paul starts his tale inside, at the apse (lines 354–410), and moves not in a linear fashion but in a series of circles that, for the poet, echo the curved spaces of the interior, always returning to the domed center. For Paul, the vaulted ceilings and dome of the church, with their golden mosaics, are not static spaces.[42] The structures of the building move, bend, spring up, stretch, and even dance. As some have pointed out, the ekphrasis focuses our attention not only on the colors and glitter of the materials of the church's decoration – marble, mosaic, precious metals – but turns the interior into a container of light and sound in motion: lights dance and revolve in midair, and the air "murmurs," while the audience imagines the voice of the poet bouncing off the marble walls.[43]

While no ekphrastic inscriptions survive from the church itself, contemporary viewers may well have been familiar with Paul's ekphrasis: perhaps they had

Figure 4.2 Interior looking towards the apse, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, 532–537
Source: Photograph by author

heard it delivered, or acquired a written copy of it.[44] Like all ekphraseis, Paul's text – as performed by him, or as re-performed by its later readers – aimed to achieve the vividness (*enargeia*) necessary to place the subject, the building, and its adornment, before the mental "eyes" of the listeners, which were led by Paul's words around the magnificent interior of the church, from the apse, west to the

imperial doors and the narthex, back to the central space (*naos*), outwards to the aisles, up to the galleries, outside to the external porticoes, and finally back into the church, where Paul describes the decoration and the great numbers of lights.[45] By leading audiences around in circles, the poet encourages rhetorical movement that echoes the architecture of the building: the oval-shaped nave of the church, with its projecting niches and apse, enclosed by a series of semidomes, curving pendentives, and the massive dome overhead, which the sixth-century viewer may have "read" as an earthly echo of the dome of Heaven.[46] The language of curving animation used by the poet evokes for the listener or reader the construction of the church, pointing back at its named architects, Isidorus of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles, and at its patron, Justinian.[47] The circularity of Paul's ekphrasis also works to produce the sacredness of the interior: if we follow the argument of Nicoletta Isar, for example, the description constructs the church as a sacred space in flux between the earthly and heavenly realms, in which the assembled "chorus" of worshippers and the building become united through circular, even dance-like, patterns of movement (χορός), drawing both towards the divine.[48] As the viewer moves around the glittering interior, the building appears to move with them.[49]

Although it has not been remarked upon previously, a similar kind of circularity is written into the inscription from Nikopolis with which we began the chapter, though it performs a different function. Like the images on the (circular) Shield of Achilles from the *Iliad*, on the pavement of the Nikopolis church, the earth is encircled (literally "in the middle," μέσσον) by the ocean. As the viewer walks around the panel, (s)he sees (moving) images of men and animals, "everything that breathes and creeps," which are "borne round about" (πέριξ φορέουσαν) the panel. This same kind of earthly circularity is also evident in another ekphrasis by Paul, on the ambo of Hagia Sophia, the pulpit in the middle of the church from which sermons were delivered. In Paul's words, the ambo is conceived of as an island encircled by the sea, the marble floor of the rest of the church.[50] While the inscription and the ekphrasis differ in length and context as read or performed, both texts use cosmological imagery in order to make audiences think about space as metaphor, defining the church interior as the container of heaven and earth: as readers walked around the ambo of Hagia Sophia, or around the mosaics in the Nikopolis church, they were walking a path at once classical (the Homeric references of the inscription, the classicizing language of Paul's ekphraseis) and Christian, echoing the circular movement of the universe while at the same time defining their place within it.[51]

Reading in motion

Like the Dometios inscription and Paul's ekphraseis, a number of late antique inscriptions envision their readers moving and responding to church interiors in similar ways. The Nikopolis text tells the viewer/reader what (s)he is seeing directly in front of him or her (δέδορκας), using the perfect tense to emphasize the continuous act of looking: (s)he looks at the mosaic, reads the inscription, and is directed back to the image by the text. The range of "seeing" words used by late antique inscriptions is relatively wide, including (in Greek) forms of ὁράω (as at

Nikopolis),[52] βλέπω,[53] κατανοέω,[54] δέρκομαι;[55] and Latin equivalents of the Greek terms, typically forms of *cerno*[56] or *video*,[57] implying the paired acts of seeing and perceiving.[58] Despite this semantic range, the act described by the inscriptions is similar, and it encourages the reader to see and make out the images or architectural spaces being described or referenced.[59]

Both prose and verse inscriptions from sacred spaces of the period encourage viewers to move into and around interiors, linking understanding and perception to movement, especially circular motion. Art historians have begun to address the impact of motion around the ancient cityscape upon viewers' perceptions of monuments and urban space, but they have yet to fully consider what effects the physical practice of embodied reading and viewing might have had on the experience of the sacred in late antiquity.[60] While patterns of liturgical motion were primary within these spaces, since the clergy processed to the altar and worshippers listened to sermons and came forward to participate in the Eucharistic rite, we must also look at the ways in which texts written into the buildings themselves encouraged extra-liturgical movement around these spaces.[61]

One of the most magnificent circular inscriptions to survive from the period, from the early sixth-century church of Hagios Polyeuktos in Constantinople, not only uses circular descriptors to narrate the structure of the building, but it was also laid out in a circle around the nave and narthex (see Figure 2.1).[62] The text survives in its complete form only in anthology, but carved fragments of it which were excavated at the site of the church at Saraçhane are extant in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. This inscription may in fact have been well known in the sixth century among elite circles in Constantinople, and perhaps influenced certain features of Paul's ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia.[63] In the church, readers would have had to read with their bodies as well as with their eyes, moving in the round as they made their way through the text. While the inscription would have been difficult to read, and many viewers may have seen it as "mere" decoration,[64] its projecting three-dimensional presence would have encouraged them to follow the text along the edges of the building, experiencing the interior on the move as they read aloud the words praising the patron of the church, the noblewoman Anicia Juliana. As a worshipper entered, (s)he would read the first lines of the epigram on plaques placed outside the narthex, which extol the virtues of Juliana and instruct the viewer on what to expect upon entering: a grand church with a colonnaded nave, a golden dome, and marble-clad walls.[65] The final panel outside the narthex described a (now lost) mosaic image of the baptism of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, probably placed on the upper level of the façade of the church.[66] After entering, the text apparently drew readers to the apse, starting at the east end of the south wall, running west to the entrance (lines 1–21), then picking up on the north wall and running east back to the apse (lines 22–41). Some, including Liz James, have questioned whether or not the text would actually have been legible to a reader on the ground due to its height (perhaps six meters above ground level) and its seemingly confusing layout in the interior, which begins at the apse rather than at the entrance.[67] However, this is in fact the same kind of viewing experience advocated by Paul's ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia, which begins at the eastern

Figure 4.3 Detail, carved verse inscription (on the entablature), interior of the Church of Ss. Sergius and Bacchus (now the mosque Küçük Ayasofya), Constantinople, 527–536

Source: Photograph by author

end before moving to the western end of the building, and then back to the center. While some readers probably started at the apse, it may have been more difficult for congregants to walk all the way to the apse to begin the text at its beginning, and so some may have begun instead along the north wall by reading line 22, a perfectly acceptable subject for an introduction to the space: "Where do we not see that Juliana has raised marvellous churches for the saints?"[68] Wherever readers began within the interior, and whether or not they were able to read and make sense of every word, the text led them in a circle around the edges of the nave, converting the entire architectural space into a prayer for the noble patroness.

The Polyeuktos epigram is unusual among extant epigrams because of its length, but other encircling verse texts from the period work in similar ways.[69] A competing sixth-century epigram, from the Church of Ss. Sergius and Bacchus, built by Justinian and Theodora around 527 near the imperial palace in Constantinople, runs around the base of the drum of the dome in beautifully carved uncial capitals, testifying to the good works of the imperial couple (Figure 4.3):

> Other sovereigns have honored dead men whose labor was unprofitable, but our sceptered Justinian, fostering piety, honors with a splendid abode the servant of Christ, Begetter of all things, Sergius; whom not the burning breath of fire, nor

> the sword, nor any other constraint of torments disturbed; but who endured to be slain for the sake of Christ, God, gaining by his blood heaven as his home. May he in all things guard the rule of the sleepless sovereign and increase the power of the God-crowned Theodora whose mind is adorned with piety, whose constant toil lies in unsparing efforts to nourish the destitute.[70]

Scholars have focused on the text's argument for the superiority of its imperial patrons over others, including Anicia Juliana herself, evident in the emphasis on the special piety of Justinian and Theodora as well as in the first line, with its clear criticism of the "unprofitable" labor of "other sovereigns" (ἄλλοι . . . βασιλῆες).[71] But in addition to its clear political and panegyric functions, the text encourages readers to embody the praise of, and prayer for, the emperor and empress, reading the text aloud as they walked around the interior octagon, an arrangement that punctuated the text in space. The circle formed by the monumental letters of the text may well have functioned as a kind of apotropaic band around the interior of the church, as did inscriptions on more portable objects such as a silver paten from Syria, produced in the mid-sixth century (see e.g. the related flask, Figure 2.2).[72] The paten would perhaps be turned by a priest as he distributed the Eucharist to the congregation, allowing them to get glimpses of the text, which recorded the donation of the patron: "+ [vessel] of St. Sergius. For the memory of Baradatos, son of Heliodoros."[73] While a reader, especially the priest, can turn this kind of object in their hands, reading the text as they turn, the encounter with building inscriptions is different, as curious readers must turn their very bodies to make sense of the whole text.[74] In the Church of Sergius and Bacchus, the act of reading the inscription – much of which is still legible *in situ* in the building, now used as a mosque, Little Hagia Sophia (Küçük Ayasofya), and retains traces of reddish paint that may (or may not) be ancient – encouraged audiences to consider the eternal "labor" of the "sleepless sovereign" Justinian and the "constant toil" of his wife Theodora, all the while walking in a never-ending circle around the church.

Inscriptions from church pavements are occasionally laid out as circles, or are framed by them, encouraging their readers to move in more tightly circumscribed circles as they read and re-performed prayers for donors. Other texts inscribe a kind of circular viewing that belies their standard rectangular layouts. A sixteen-line epigram from the late fourth- or early fifth-century church at Kanatha (modern Qanawat) in southwestern Syria performs a complex series of rhetorical moves to encourage proper, productive responses from worshippers. The text, carved onto a basalt block, was framed by a *tabula ansata*. As the block was found reused in a later tomb, it is unclear where in the church it was placed originally, but its size (1.18 × 0.65 meters) suggests that it originally belonged to a wall or pier of the church. The text, written in hexameter (as was the Nikopolis inscription), performs a relatively lengthy ekphrasis on the church, staging certain responses for the reader:

> First of all, pray [εὔχεο] now; and then, having prayed, observe [ἀθρεῖ].
> Delight [τέρπεο] yourself seeing the skillful works [πολυδαίδαλα ἔργα]

of the precious Church which thanks to unresting labors
bishop Kassius Epiodorus, who has right knowledge,
accomplished zealously and quickly
with the aid of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
From the famous elaborated ground, the ornament [κόσμος] fits
outstretched, resplendent with bright white slabs of stone,
with columns around from each side: here all people
who believe in Christ say their prayers.
In the rear of the church on the neck of rich earth
the bishop built magnificent towers that reach the stars:
they, rearing at the same height and distance,
both hold together carved tendons,
which have lovely and dazzling form,
holding up doves from the Holy Spirit.[75]

This epigram uses a number of ekphrastic tools to tell the story of the building: it is a famous building (κλυτοεργός, a "famous work") constructed (with divine assistance) by the bishop, Kassios Epiodoros; the brilliant decoration shines (φαινόμενος), perhaps including the basalt of the church itself, parts of which originally may have been polished to a high sheen. The meter and vocabulary of the text are not as cosmopolitan as those of epigrams from the capital. However, they do indicate that the poet was familiar with classicizing terminology and tropes, especially the "modern style" made famous by the late antique poet Nonnus, belying the inscription's village context. The poem also demonstrates the author's familiarity with the essential components of ekphrasis, including the construction of the building as an active presence: the ornament stretches out, while the towers at the back of the church rear up towards the heavens.[76] Not only does the building move, the epigram tells us, but so too do the worshippers. The reader imagined by the poem prays, looks, watches those worshipping, delights, and moves around the interior, responding to different epigrammatic prompts, which are triggered by temporal cues and deictics that place the reader in time and space: "pray now" (εὔχεο νῦν), look "here" (ἐνθάδε). Importantly, the epigram leads the viewer from the entrance (possibly the location of the plaque), where (s)he reflects on the architectural accomplishments of the bishop, into the nave, where the faithful pray, and then outside, to look at the exterior "towers," a progression similar to that described by Paul the Silentiary's ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia.[77] However, although the epigram imagines the reader moving around the church, the inscription itself is static, arranged in horizontal lines within a rectangular frame, embedded the fabric of the building. The reader has to hold the text in his or her mind, or perhaps listen to it read aloud by a fellow congregant, in order to read the interior through the lens of the text.

It is important to point out that circular viewing was not unique to Christian sacred spaces, even in this period. We have already seen that Paul's ekphrasis, and the inscriptions from Kanatha and Nikopolis, draw on the classical vocabulary used for descriptions and evocations of buildings, which also included an

Figure 4.4 Marble Court (entrance hall of the baths) with carved inscription around the uppermost level of the podium, Sardis, Turkey, renovated in the fifth century

Source: © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY

emphasis on circularity, such as the second-century description by Lucian of a small bathhouse (*The Hall*, Περὶ τοῦ οἴκου, a text to which we will return shortly). Similar rhetorical tools are used by inscriptions in secular spaces, as in a carved inscription from the large bath complex at the wealthy city of Sardis in western Turkey, which reveals similar ekphrastic concerns to those of the Kanatha church inscription. The text is fragmentary, but it recorded a fifth-century renovation and ran around the podium of the Marble Court of the baths, a reception hall through which people entered the main bathing halls (Figure 4.4).[78] Like the epigram from Hagios Polyeuktos, this poem ran around the entire interior of the hall, starting from the south side of the room and progressing to the west and then to the north, though the Sardis inscription was written at eye-level, allowing readers to access the text up close.[79] Its letters may have been painted red to enhance their legibility and visual impact, as were the earlier Roman dedications carved on the entablature of the same hall.[80] The poem reads:

> [Wonder] seizes me, whence the work [---] earth
> of the immense high-roofed, gold-gleaming chamber
> [---] old age [---]
> Memnonius, father of the country [---]

> As soon as he saw, he decorated [---] he immediately created
> an ever-living decoration which envy cannot [---]
> He added a broad foundation, unfolding [---]
> Always gaze [---] gold [---]
> + The golden-ceilinged [---] was restored [---] of the city, in the
> eighth indiction, in the month of July; thus the revetment [---]
> laying the floor [---] apart from the mosaic and the other [---].[81]

While only portions of the poem survive, the text bears many similarities to the church inscriptions: an emphasis on looking, visual delight, and wonder (*thauma*);[82] the tale of the renovation of the baths by the patron, Memnonius; and the height and glittering golden decoration of the chamber. Other elements of the text are more typical of Roman and early Byzantine bath inscriptions, including the emphasis on diverting the evil forces of envy (φθόνος) from the building.[83] Interestingly, the text ends with two lines of prose that summarize the particulars of the hall's renovation, emphasizing the ekphrastic character of the previous lines. The Marble Court itself seems not to have borne any golden decoration, but gold mosaic tesserae were found in the adjacent roofed cold bathing hall (*frigidarium*), along with polychrome tesserae, suggesting that the apses in that hall, if not the entire ceiling, were covered with mosaics that included zones of golden decoration.[84] The inscription, then, was a text that conditioned viewers to enter the next room of the complex: starting at the south end and reading round the edges, readers would perhaps make three quarters of a circle before doubling back and entering the golden-roofed part of the baths. The circular viewing dictated by the verbal content, as well as the arrangement of the inscriptions considered thus far, encouraged circular patterns of movement, asking viewers to read in the round with their eyes and bodies in order to understand both sacred and secular interiors.

In a sense, we have come full circle, back to Paul the Silentiary's circular vision of Hagia Sophia, making clear how closely related these "ekphrastic epigrams" were to their longer literary counterparts. As we have seen from the very layout of the epigrams from Constantinople and Sardis, the circularity of some inscriptions was more than just a rhetorical trope; rather, it was essential to the way in which viewers experienced sacred as well as secular architecture. However, while the "circle" of the Sardis inscription was intended to heighten the wondrous impression of the interior of the baths for the reader, the circles at Hagios Polyeuktos, Kanatha, and elsewhere, while inscribed in different formats, all do something further: they encourage a circular vision of the Christian universe (*kosmos*), a type of celestial motion also seen in theological texts of the period, emphasized through the words and images that adorned the interior (*kosmos* also as adornment).[85] While not every worshipper would necessarily have moved in a perfect circle around these churches, the relentless gyrations of these epigrams encouraged the eyes and the minds of the faithful to move in a series of circles starting and ending with the apse, a curved space in which Christ or the Virgin may have been depicted, perhaps nimbed in a mandorla surrounded by circular busts of the saints, as they were depicted in churches in both the eastern and western Mediterranean

Figure 4.5 Detail of round portraits of saints, wall mosaic of the sanctuary, San Vitale, Ravenna, c. 547

Source: Photograph by author

(Figure 4.5).[86] Moving their eyes and their bodies in circles as they read these texts, viewers in early Christian interiors would have been constantly reminded of the motion of the heavens, experiencing the church as a sacred space through vision and motion, an emphasis on movement already built into the medium of mosaic, especially floor mosaic.[87] In the later Byzantine period, encircling inscriptions became even more popular, wrapping the exteriors of churches and encouraging their readers to take circular journeys around the building before or after services in the interior, an arrangement that also appears to have influenced the monumental Arabic building inscriptions of the early Islamic period.[88] During this period, circumambulation of some of the most important circular shrines for Christians and Muslims – the Holy Sepulchre, as well as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Kaʿaba in Mecca – began to appear as a formalized ritual, suggesting a ramping up of the importance of motion, especially motion in the round, directed by words writ large in interiors and on exteriors.[89]

Responding to interiors

Late antique epigrams use the tropes of ekphrasis in order to lead viewers' eyes, bodies, and minds around sacred as well as some secular interiors, encouraging circular *perigeseis* that led to certain physical and metaphorical realizations about

Figure 4.6 Entrance lintel with inscription, Church of St. Theodore, Gerasa (modern Jerash), Jordan, 496

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

the relationship between earthly architecture and the heavenly sphere. While these inscribed responses were idealized ones, and so do not necessarily preserve the reactions of viewers in real time, they were an essential component of their interiors and seem likely to have fundamentally shaped one's experience of the spaces. As Edmund Thomas has made clear of Roman ekphrastic inscriptions, these texts "suggest to successive viewers how they might respond correctly to the *wonder*ful spectacle."[90]

In addition to movement, the inscriptions encourage other types of reactions. In the church at Kanatha, motion is linked to prayer as well as to visual delight, encouraging viewers to appreciate the beauty of the building, a reaction related to the "wonder" (*thauma*) expressed by the imagined speaker of the inscription from the Marble Court at Sardis.[91] Wonder is in fact a very common encouraged response in the period, seen frequently in Greek as well as Latin inscriptions.[92] In the Church of St. Theodore at Gerasa in Jordan, an inscription carved into the lintel above the doorway to the church asks entering worshippers to see the building as a marvel: "I have been made at once a marvel [θάμβος] and a wonder [θαῦμα] to those passing by [παρερχομένοισιν]."[93] (Figure 4.6). In the courtyard of the Cathedral Church of Madaba (575/576), also in Jordan, a fragmentary mosaic inscription details the expectation that viewers exclaim aloud at the new and impressive double cistern of the church: "everyone, marvelling, says, 'A cistern within a cistern, O the wonder!'" (Figure 4.7).[94] An inscription from the pavement of the north annex of the same church, dated to 603, performs a similar function, asking readers to look at or to imagine an image of the patron of the building: "Looking upon [ὁρῶν] the gentleness of Leontios the priest, wonder (θαύμαζε) at the honor

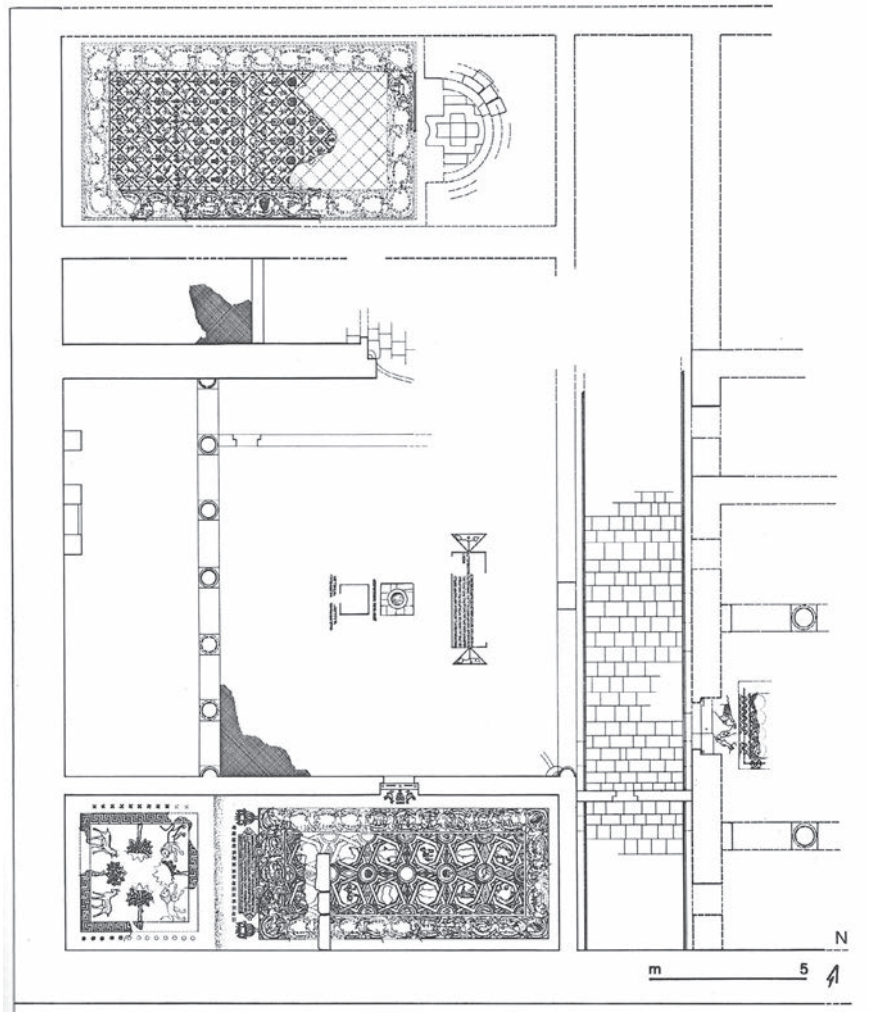

Figure 4.7 Plan of the Cathedral Church with inscription (in the middle of the courtyard, next to the cistern), Madaba, Jordan, 575/576

Source: After Piccirillo 1989a, 25, by kind permission of Studium Biblicum Franciscanum

of his buildings and works."[95] This emphasis on wonder is particularly prevalent in the inscriptions of churches in the Levant, but it is also found in the western Mediterranean, as in the fifth-century mosaic inscription on the rear wall of Santa Sabina in Rome, which expects the viewer to express amazement ("You are amazed," *miraris*) at the spectacle of the church and the efforts of its patron, the priest Peter the Illyrian.[96] The language of a number of other inscriptions seems to

imply that an exaggerated reaction to the grandeur and dazzling decor of interiors was expected and encouraged in the period, as we have already seen at Nola and at Gerasa, a response also written into late antique villa and bath inscriptions.[97]

In advising the viewer to give in to the visual appreciation of the more stunning aspects of church decoration, these texts encourage a response that was sometimes theorized as easy and empty in the period. While wonder was a typical (and ancient) response in ekphraseis, present even in Homer's famous description of the shield of Achilles,[98] a number of Roman and late antique authors advise that beautiful or wonderful images or sights can tend to draw forth only superficial or even negative responses from viewers. As Edmund Thomas puts it, "wonder encompasses a wide variety of specific, physical reactions reflecting either positive feelings of awe, amazement, and even adoration, or negative ones such as shock, horror, and intimidation."[99] Authors of the period known as the Second Sophistic (roughly the second and early third centuries CE) were particularly engaged with the implications of different responses to images and spaces. In the preface to Philostratus the Elder's work *Images* (*Imagines*), the speaker advises his young charge to push through the first-order response of wonder in order to consider the stories behind, and meaning of, a painting of a scene from the Trojan War: "Have you noticed, my boy, that the painting here is based on Homer, or have you failed to do so because you are lost in wonder . . . ? Well then, let us try to get at the meaning of it."[100] The second-century author Lucian articulates these issues even more clearly and cuttingly in his work *The Hall* (*De Domo*), in which two nameless speakers compete to describe the particulars of a building.[101] The first speaker declares that wonder is a response for "ordinary" viewers rather than educated ones, who are held to a higher standard:

> the same law does not hold for ordinary and for educated men [πεπαιδευμένοις ἀνδράσιν]. No, for the former it is enough to do the usual thing – just to see, to look about, to cast their eyes everywhere, to crane their necks at the ceiling, to gesticulate and to take their joy in silence for fear of not being able to say anything adequate to what they see. But when a man of culture beholds beautiful things, he will not be content, I am sure, to harvest their charm with his eyes alone . . . he will do all he can to linger there and make some return for the spectacle in speech.[102]

The first speaker establishes a playful justification for his own description of the building, casting it as the proper response of an "educated man." The second speaker proceeds to counter this justification with a wink: rather than prodding the educated man to speech, a building can "dazzle [ἐκπλήττει] and frighten him, disturb his thought and make him more timid," as the beauty of the building and its interior can exceed the skill of the viewer to describe it.[103] In the end, neither argument matters, as Lucian's imagined audience is itself distracted by the wondrous interior.[104] These same modes of response to interiors were still current in the sixth century, as is clear from Procopius's description of Hagia Sophia, which emphasizes wonder as a primary reaction to the magnificence of Justinian's church.[105]

While some elites may have perceived wonder as an empty response, for the vast majority of late antique viewers, wonder was an important and powerful reaction to the overwhelmingly colorful and varied decor of the Christian interior. Many of the more ekphrastic inscriptions seem to recognize the danger of empty wonder, grounding their own imagined responses to their buildings by reference to the deeds of the patron or the sacredness of the church interior, giving "ordinary" readers/viewers more to think and talk about in order to channel the visual delight into spiritually meaningful responses.[106] At Madaba, viewers should focus on the "gentleness" of the patron, priest Leontios, while worshippers in Santa Sabina in Rome are encouraged to glory in the achievements of Peter the Illyrian. All of these features are in fact encapsulated in the epigram from the Kanatha church, already discussed, where the reader is instructed to pray and then enjoy the beauty of the church: "First, pray now; then, having prayed, look again; enjoy yourself looking at the richly-made works."[107] The epigram continues by praising the donor, Bishop Kassius Epiodorus, and describing the marble pavement, columns, and great height of the interior, further directing the reader's gaze around the space and endowing the physical structure of the church with spiritual significance. As long as the faithful viewer remembered to pray, (s)he could enjoy the aesthetic beauty of the church, which served as a testament to the greatness of its patron and a glory to God, Christ, and the saints. Christianizing this Graeco-Roman trope (which was probably also an authentic reaction), these texts ask viewers to embrace and then move past the dazzle and brilliance of interiors, as did the golden mosaic inscriptions that emphasized the "light of faith" over visually perceptible light. Instead of leading the mind's eye to the imperceptible light of the divine, though, these texts remind the reader to think of the patron and pray on his or her behalf (as at Kanatha), or implicitly encourage the faithful to connect wondrous sites to even more wondrous Christian miracles. The "cistern within a cistern, O the wonder!" of the inscription at Madaba, for example, a phrase repeated in the mosaics of the courtyard of that church in both Greek and Aramaic, may in fact have evoked the Virgin's miraculous womb that gave birth to Christ, an event that caused the fourth-century patriarch John Chrysostom to exclaim in one of his sermons: "But what should I say, or what should I speak? For the wonder amazes me."[108] The enclosure of the texts within the courtyard of the Madaba church, a walled space through which one passed before entering the church interior, may have emphasized the wondrous nature of Christ's gestation and birth for the reader through its parallelism in language and position within a space filled by the reader's own body. Properly channeled and connected to (Christian) erudition, wonder could be a powerful tool that encouraged "correct" reactions to Christian interiors, and which could turn rowdy or overly quiet congregations into engaged ones.[109] Once they harnessed their amazement, congregants and clergy alike could use this powerful response to condition themselves to imagine, or even to see, epiphanic or "sacred visions beyond the constraints of secular visuality,"[110] turning churches into spaces in which worshippers could have a wondrous experience of, or encounter with, the divine.[111]

Other responses encouraged by texts are linked to sacred spaces within or near the church or, alternatively, to images. We will return in Chapter 5 to this latter

category of texts paired with images, sometimes referred to as "titles" (*tituli*), though they do not give a succinct name for an image in the modern sense. Like the epigram from Kanatha, a number of inscriptions encourage viewers to pray, often in particular spaces or through sacred images displayed in the interior.[112]

In addition to prayer, epigrams occasionally memorialized and reenacted more specific ritual actions and movements that took place inside Christian interiors. Several baptisteries in Rome feature such inscriptions, including the Lateran Baptistery (also called San Giovanni in Fonte), which was remodeled in the first half of the fifth century by Pope Sixtus III and his archdeacon, who later became Pope Leo I.[113] The epigram, carved in pairs of two lines (distiches) on the octagonal architrave surrounding the baptismal font, articulates baptismal practice in symbolic terms, but also guides practice: it instructs "you," the reader, to "plunge" (*purgente*) into the font if you wish to "be cleansed" (*esse volens . . . mundare*) in the water, and admonishes you not to let your sins "terrify" (*terreat*) you as you enter the holy waters of the font.[114] These instructions are simple enough, and on occasion are pared down even further, as in the baptistery of the Cathedral of Tipasa in Algeria, dated to the late fourth or early fifth century, whose floor mosaic inscription takes the form of a simple calculus: "If anyone searches to learn how to live eternally, here let him be washed by water [*hic lavetur aqua . . .*] and let him see the heavenly kingdom [*. . . videat caelestia regna*]." (Figure 4.8).[115] These practical if salvation-oriented texts stand out from other baptistery inscriptions, which are either simple donation inscriptions, as in the baptistery of the Church of

Figure 4.8 Mosaic inscription, pavement of the baptistery, Cathedral of Tipasa, Algeria, late fourth or early fifth century

Source: Miranda Williams/Manar al-Athar

Figure 4.9 Donor inscriptions, baptistery of the Church of St. Felix, Kélibia (Demna), Tunisia, sixth century, now in the Bardo Museum, Tunis

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

St. Felix at Kélibia (Demna), Tunisia (Figure 4.9), recording the patronage of the donors Aquinius, his wife Juliana, and their children;[116] or epigrams which grandly proclaim the symbolic meanings and virtues of baptism, as in the Orthodox (Neonian) Baptistery (early fifth century) at Ravenna, whose golden mosaic texts set over four interior niches quote biblical passages in order to contextualize the ritual in more complex typological, Christological terms **(see Color Plate 3)**.[117] Oscillating between the practical ("use this space for . . .") and the symbolic, these texts encourage readers to respond to their spaces at multiple levels as they circle the baptismal font, providing presiding priests and worshippers with interpretative aids and coping mechanisms (e.g. the Lateran Baptistery's invocation not to let your sins "terrify" you) appropriate to different levels of understanding.[118] Even if the participants in the ritual of baptism did not read the inscriptions in their entirety, their verbal content and spatial position permanently fixed ritual motion and action inside baptisteries.

Another Christian building at Tipasa, the Church of Alexander, built in the fourth or early fifth century, features an unusual verse dedication that ends with a striking description of the liturgy of the Eucharist, celebrated by the personified "Christian Age," *Crhistiana* [*sic*] *aetas*: "happy to touch the holy thresholds with its feet, always singing sacred songs, happy to extend hands in the sacrament"

Figure 4.10 Mosaic inscription, pavement of the Church of Alexander, Tipasa, Algeria, fourth or early fifth century

Source: Miranda Williams/Manar al-Athar

(Figure 4.10).[119] Placed at the east end of the nave pavement, the text describes the approach of the assembled faithful, represented by a Christian personification,[120] to the threshold of the sanctuary, records the celebration of the rite by the congregation, and concludes with the "rejoicing hands" (*manus . . . gaudens*) of the presiding priest reaching out to distribute the sacrament to the congregants. Inscribed immediately in front of the sanctuary, the text served as a witness to liturgical practice, fixing the memory of that practice in place, rather than as a guide to specific steps of the ritual. These same lines appear again, slightly altered, in the mosaic verse dedication of the Church of Bishop Cresconius at Djemila, probably built in the sixth century, located only two hundred fifty miles away from Tipasa, in which the sacrament and the liturgy become a kind of medicine that heal a schism in the church (*sacramento Dei medicinam sumere (s)c(h)ismae*, probably the Donatist schism which divided the African churches in the period).[121] Instead of appearing in a single text block like the Tipasa inscription, the inscription at Djemila is arranged in two columns of text in order to accommodate additional lines praising the bishop, supplementing the text's impact as a monumental inscription and impressing readers familiar with the shorter (and likely earlier) text.

These active inscriptions exhibit the interest in motion embedded in the ekphrastic inscriptions that we considered earlier – indeed, some of them are the same texts, including the Kanatha inscription – but they also encourage a more particular set of responses to buildings. Inscribed texts encouraged viewers to marvel at impressive Christian interiors, connecting their astonishment to the built histories and sacred uses of the buildings, recorded ritual practice to guide to participants involved, and emphasized the rich symbolism of the liturgy, memorializing ephemeral practice in the space in which it occurred. Meant to be read by worshippers as confirmations of the symbolic value and meaning of their

own actions in church – during baptism, or during services – the inscriptions also record proper ways of thinking about one's actions and activate spaces of worship continuously, even when services were not taking place.

Reading and speaking voice

Building inscriptions in mosaic, stone, and paint not only encouraged motion, thought, and symbolic interpretation of actions and spaces, but it also encouraged readers to speak, and to imagine interiors speaking back. In the fifth and sixth centuries CE, in particular, the poets and authors behind our inscriptions experimented with epigraphic voices that encouraged readers to stop, read, and react. Like many of the other verbal and visual elements of the inscriptions, this emphasis on and play with voice in fact predated the late antique period by many centuries.

Already in the eighth century BCE, Greek inscriptions, especially epigrams, purported to "speak" for their artworks, often either dedications to the gods or memorials for the deceased.[122] These "speaking objects" (*oggetti parlanti*) imagine voices of individuals acting doubly: to construct an (imagined) record of verbal proclamations, fixing elements of these otherwise ephemeral performances in stone or paint, and to encourage viewers to approach them as active, moving objects. Perhaps the most famous of these objects today is the funerary statue of Phrasikleia, a young girl who lived and died in Athens in the mid-sixth century BCE, whose epitaph, written onto the statue's base, reads: "I, Phrasikleia's *sêma*, shall always be called maiden, the gods allotting me this name in place of marriage"[123] (Figure 4.11). When passersby read this text, most likely aloud, they spoke in the voice of the statue (the *sêma* – "sign," or more specifically, "tomb" – of the girl), perhaps remembering her as she was in life, imagining themselves in her shoes, or more generally contemplating the nature and function of funerary memorials *vis-à-vis* the deceased that they commemorated. The complexities of Phrasikleia's inscription are numerous, as Jesper Svenbro and others have pointed out, and include an emphasis on sonority, plays on the nature of name and fame (*kleos*, a word built into her own name), and an invitation for the reader to read the text against the statue, connecting the fragile fame of the deceased girl with the closed lotus held by her image.[124]

While the "who" of the speaker, and of the imagined audience, is sometimes difficult to discern in cases where the context is less clear than that of Phrasikleia, these "speaking" texts in fact often make deliberate use of these ambiguities in order to prompt deeper contemplation. By giving different kinds of voices to objects, inscriptions were able to play with issues of likeness and representation and the agency of images, as well as that of readers/viewers, bridging the realms of text and image to encourage audiences to contemplate the nature of the artwork itself and its meta-commentary on death and devotion. Although separated from Phrasikleia's *sêma* by almost one thousand years, late antique building inscriptions sometimes functioned in similar modes, their composers actively adapting the strategies of dedicatory and funerary epigrams for new architectural contexts,

Figure 4.11 Statue of Phrasikleia, marble, H: 84 cm, c. 540 BCE, National Archaeological Museum, Athens (inv. NM 4889)

Source: Marie Mauzy/Art Resource, NY

giving an imagined voice to the written word.[125] From the second and third centuries CE onwards, inscriptions, especially epigrams, began to display an intense fascination not only with different imagined voices (and, implicitly, audiences), but also with the long-debated relationship between voice and vision, drawing on the occasional tension between the two forms of reception and expression to influence readers' reactions to and actions within buildings.[126]

Some of the inscriptions considered already address the reader directly in the second person ("you see"): the inscription from the Nikopolis church with which we began, for example, combines address in the second person with a powerful deictic that particularizes the reader's vision: "Here you see clearly" (ἔνθα δέδορκας). Personalizing themselves for their readers, these inscriptions reach out and grab attention, encouraging audiences to interact with spaces and monuments.[127] Second-person inscriptions address the reader or audience in the same way as do late antique ekphraseis: for example, in his descriptions of the churches of St. Stephen and St. Sergius at Gaza, Chorikios invites his audience ("you") to follow him around the buildings.[128] When a reader vocalized the text of an inscription in the second person, (s)he also became a guide for his or her companions, leading them on a group tour of the space and encouraging viewers to consider the meanings of texts, images, and spaces together.[129]

In addition to second-person voice, patrons used other epigraphic voices, including variants on the first person, inviting readers to consider exactly what kind of *persona* they inhabited as they vocalized the text of the inscription. Occasionally dedicatory inscriptions envision the donor of the building speaking in the first person.[130] A number of secular building inscriptions that quote or purport to quote the words of donors date to the fourth or fifth centuries, including a mosaic epigram from a villa at Aïn Témouchent, near Sétif in modern Algeria, paired with an apotropaic mask-like head of the god Ocean, demanding in the voice of the patrons that "hateful" or "reckless speech" (*lingua proterva*) be silenced inside the house.[131]

Bold statements such as these are echoed by church dedicatory inscriptions from both east and west, though they typically perform a different sort of rhetorical move, linking the dedications of buildings to the piety of their dedicators, presenting the patron's "devotional self."[132] The (carved?) dedication of the Church of Ss. Cosmas and Damian in the Basiliscus district of Constantinople, built in the early sixth century by the empress Sophia, does not survive today but apparently featured the imagined voice of Sophia herself: "I, your servant Sophia, offer this gift to your servants. Christ, take your own [things], and to my emperor Justin [Justin I] give in payment victory upon victory over diseases and the barbarians."[133] The empress offers up her church to Christ and to her subjects, and asks Christ to receive the gift, which is already his, as everything comes from him. In return, she asks that he grant her husband Justin health and military victory in return, a traditional form of reciprocity based on the principle of *do ut des*, "I give so that you may give," derived from the classical tradition of votive dedication but articulated as a Christian prayer.[134] Across the empire, in Rome, the now-lost mosaic dedicatory inscription in the apse of the great Cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, built c. 432–440, featured its patron, Pope Sixtus III, speaking in much the same terms: "Virgin Mary, I, Sixtus, have dedicated to you new houses as proper gifts."[135] Readers may well have read this text aloud, re-performing the spirit of the original dedication by Sixtus of the "proper" gifts to the Virgin.[136]

While it may seem strange for readers to be encouraged to insert themselves into these usually personal relationships between patrons and Christ or the Virgin,

these texts in fact allow the perpetual re-performance of aspects of the patrons' original dedications, which may have been lengthier. Readers in Sophia's church in Constantinople would continually pray for the emperor's health and victory in battle, while those in Rome would remind the Virgin of the grandeur of Sixtus's original donation.[137] Both these texts acted as a kind of publicity for their patrons, labeling their architectural gifts for future groups of readers, a feature also seen in synagogue inscriptions, albeit rarely.[138] While they may seem like statements intended merely to emphasize the patrons' wealth and status, these inscriptions perhaps also served to remind the ever busy divine of the buildings given by the faithful, a function of earlier Greek and Roman dedications as well.[139]

When speaking – or rather, when encouraging others to speak their words – donors could choose to emphasize different aspects of their architectural gifts in different contexts. In an inscription from the center of the mosaic pavement of the small Chapel of Christ Pantocrator at Beth Guvrin in modern Israel (c. 500), the patron, Obodianos, combines self-praise with the language of Homeric epic:

> I, noble priest of this place, gentle Obodianos, decorated the ceiling, the floor and the threshold of the church of Christ All-Emperor, with mosaics, through my pupils.[140]

This text employs a symmetry of arrangement, strengthened by the placement of line breaks in the mosaic inscription, which pairs the "Christ, Emperor of All" of the first line with the "gentle Obodianos" of the final line, so that the reader begins with Christ (in the genitive, as recipient of the dedication) and ends with Obodianos (in the nominative, speaking as dedicant), emphasizing the connection between the Christ and the donor. Obodianos is described in Homeric terms: he is a "gentle" and "noble" (ἀμύμων) person, the latter word a term used to describe individuals as well as families (Odysseus's house is similarly "noble").[141] In its Christian context, the same word also meant "blameless," a feature of other first-person inscriptions, encouraging divine and human audiences to think of, and to celebrate, the good and sinless character of the patron.[142] Although the text is succinct, its list of the parts of the interior – the ceiling, the floor, and the entrance threshold, all viewed from the center of the pavement where the inscription is located – may have acted as a kind of abbreviated guide to readers as they exited the building, glimpsing once again up at the roof and down at the floor before crossing the threshold on the way out, taking with them the positive impression of the "gentle," "blameless" patron.

While reading these first-person texts, worshippers literally put themselves in the verbal shoes of the patron, allowing them to re-present the building as a gift to the divine on behalf of its builder. But while texts like that at Beth Guvrin seem to fix the memory of the patron inside his or her church or chapel, they also draw attention to the patron's physical presence or absence. When Obodianos was inside his chapel, performing the service, readers of the text would have immediately connected his voice and body to the mosaic decoration of the interior. However, if he were absent or even deceased, the text would have signaled his absence, making his memory in the space contingent upon the re-performance of his inscription.

Another group of building inscriptions, anonymous dedications, pointedly draw attention to the absence not only of the patron's physical body but also of their very name. It is important to note in this context the flexibility of anonymous inscriptions, as they could be personalized by each speaker in turn. One of these texts, the dedicatory inscription written in silver tesserae that runs below the visionary mosaic of Christ in the apse of the church of Hosios David in Thessaloniki, completed c. 540, features an anonymous female voice that draws attention yet again to the fulfillment of a vow, presumably the construction or decoration of the church: "Having made a vow, I was successful, and having succeeded, I fulfilled (the vow)" ((Εὐξαμ)ένη ἐπέτυχα καὶ ἐπιτυχο(ῦσ)α ἐπλήροσα) **(Color Plate 26)**.[143] The inscription concludes with another reference to her vow, referring to the patron as "one whose name God knows" (ἧς οἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ ὄνομα). While readers of any gender could re-perform and in some sense claim the dedication as their own, the text would perhaps have been especially charged for female readers, as they could inhabit the "voice" of the inscription more fully, whereas readers who were men would have had to perform a kind of gender-bending in order to claim the prayer as their own. By fixing their own words onto their churches, elites could preserve the varied verbal and performative essences of their donations, which were reactivated and then transformed when read aloud by worshippers.

A number of dedicatory inscriptions, especially in the later fifth and sixth centuries, instead gave voices to the buildings themselves. These speaking churches are the most closely related to the speaking objects (*oggetti parlanti*) of antiquity, though their voices issue from walls and floors rather than from mimetic representations of human patrons or the deceased, playing with the relationship between patron, monument, and reader. A (carved?) epigram from a church built in Constantinople around 520 proclaimed its donation by the consul and prefect Theodorus to Justin I and Justinian I:

> I am the most famous temple of the emperor Justin,
> and the consul Theodorus the strong, three times a prefect,
> dedicated me for the emperor [Justin] and his son Justinian,
> the general of the whole army.[144]

We don't know where in the church this epigram appeared, or what it looked like, as it survives only in anthology; no archaeological trace of the church survives. A second epigram from the same church indicates that Theodorus means to convey the church was built *on behalf of* the emperor, rather than dedicated to him: "You (the reader) see the famous work of the Emperor Justin and Justinian . . . this was made by famous Theodorus."[145] Interestingly, although both epigrams contain similar content, focusing on the elite patrons and their acts of dedication, their voices encourage very different responses. The second inscription, written in the second person, speaks in our familiar ekphrastic mode, instructing the viewer what (s)he "sees," while the other epigram puts the reader in the shoes of the building itself. Here we face a whole other set of representational issues: readers become not speaking statues but *speaking architecture*.

This material translation enacted by the reader – from flesh to stone – may seem unusual, but it served not only to draw attention to the text, demanding a response, but also to force the reader to consider his or her attitude towards, or relationship with, the emperor, and (ideally) to reaffirm it. An entire cycle of inscriptions from another church in the capital, Hagia Euphemia, first built by the empress Aelia Eudoxia in the early fifth century and renovated by her Theodosian descendants Galla Placidia and again by Anicia Juliana in the early sixth century, focuses attention on the magnificence of the renovated church, the first of which begins: "I am the house of the Trinity, and three generations built me" (εἰμὶ δόμος Τριάδος, τρισσὴ δέ με τεῦξε γενέθλη).[146] Cleverly connecting the Christian Trinity and the three generations of imperial female patrons who built and redecorated the church, the epigram places these classicizing words into the mouths of elite Constantinopolitans who would have recognized the verbal pun, which emphasizes personal patronage, erudition (*paideia*), and dynastic continuity.

Other first-person building inscriptions draw even more deeply on the wells of classical language and meter. In the sixth-century church at Apollonia (Reshef) in modern Israel, a mosaic inscription from the nave pavement uses the language and dactylic hexameter of classical epic, enabling the church to declare its supremacy:

> + I am a house better than ambrosia and [nectar], and Marinos built me, praising his divine renowned skill and always preserving his undefiled and mystic mind.[147]

Here, the educated readers who knew their Homer would perhaps recognize certain phrases, including "ambrosia and nectar," two substances set out by the nymph Calypso for the god Hermes to eat in the *Odyssey*.[148] In personifying the church as speaker, the inscription forces the reader to assume the role of the building as (s)he reads the text aloud while at the same time recognizing that the text itself is not the building: the epigram is just a poem until the reader voices it, converting an architectural form to a human one. The voice of the church plays linguistic games with Christian classicism, proclaiming the superiority of church over pagan temple by using the very classical language of the traditions associated with the latter.

This same combination of Christian triumphalism and Homeric quotation are united with even stronger anti-pagan sentiment in two inscriptions carved into lintels of the Church of St. Theodore at Gerasa, completed by the year 496 by a bishop with a classical name, Aineias (Aeneas) (Figure 4.12).[149] Placed at the entrance to the church, and still at least partially legible, these two texts, both written in the first person, shaped worshippers' responses as they entered and exited the church. As viewers walked into the open atrium of church, they looked up to the lintel over the doorway and read an epigram in which the Christian church trumpeted its victory over the previous, polluted pagan space: "I have been made at once an amazement [θάμβος] and marvel [θαῦμα] to those passing by [παρερχομένοισιν], for the entire cloud of disorderliness has been dispersed, [and] instead of the former eyesore all the grace of God has surrounded me. . . . And if you wish to learn in order that you might know it well, Aineias gave this desirable

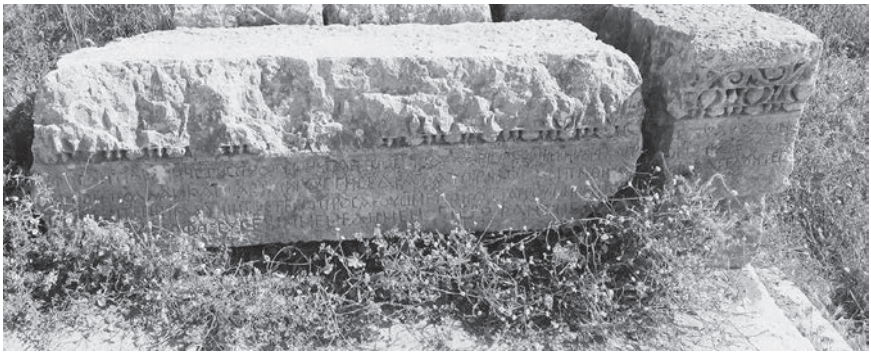

Figure 4.12 Part of the carved inscription from the exit lintel, Church of St. Theodore, Gerasa, 496 (inscription now split between the church and the site museum)

Source: Photograph by author

beauty to me, the all-wise priest practiced in piety" (see Figure 4.6).[150] The church itself speaks first to proclaim its own victory over the pagan past, and again, from the inner face of the lintel of its main doorway, to be read by those exiting, saying:

> + I am the undefiled house of victorious Theodore, immortal martyr, godlike, whose fame rushed over land and sea and the limits of the ocean. While his body is in the earth, his soul [has gone] to broad heaven, after death joining the angelic choir. He has become a bulwark against evil, an aged foundation for the city and for the inhabitants and for future citizens.[151]

The text then reverts to the third person to provide the date of the construction of the church. These two verse epigrams use Homeric language, employing the earth (land) and ocean (sea) trope with which we began this chapter to describe the fame of the martyr, and describing the "broad heaven" (οὐρανὸν εὐρύν) to which the saint's soul has ascended, effectively replacing the pagan "heavens" of the Greeks with the Christian heaven of the martyrs while evoking the life and death of Theodore in epic.[152] When read, the words of the building also would have transformed the reader into a container for the saint ("I am the house . . . ," δόμος εἰμί), making personal the connection between building, martyr, and faithful reader, who becomes involved in writing a new sacred history for the site. Interestingly, in both the Gerasa and Apollonia epigrams, the classical emphasis on fame – the *kleos* of the patron's skill at Apollonia, or of the martyr at Gerasa – is combined with a focus on Christian purity, *achrantos* (a phrase itself derived from late Roman pagan concepts of religious purity): purity of the "mind" of the patron (at Apollonia) and of the church interior itself (at Gerasa).[153]

This group of epigrams, composed in verse in the first person and displayed prominently in churches in Palestine, Arabia, and Constantinople, testifies to a

remarkable continuity of the classical epigrammatic tradition, both in the capital and in provincial urban and rural contexts. Not all of these texts were of the highest epigraphic quality: for example, the doorway inscriptions from the Church of St. Theodore at Gerasa are carved roughly, by a stonecutter whose skill did not match the high-quality production of previous centuries. However, their play with the voice of the building, incorporation of classical language and meter, and shared emphasis on themes such as purity connect these first-person texts as a group. While the inscriptions were composed very similarly to the "speaking" dedications or epitaph inscriptions of Graeco-Roman antiquity, they functioned differently, as the inscriptions of communal houses of worship rather than of the gravestones of individuals such as Phrasikleia. By adapting the context and playing within the rich world of Christian classicism, patrons (as producers) and educated viewers (as consumers) remained engaged with previous epigrammatic traditions, giving classical voices to churches in order that they might articulate (via their human readers) their own triumph over the spaces of paganism. Endowing a building with a voice is a different matter from giving a voice to a mimetic representation of a donor or the deceased. As the reader lent his or her voice to these texts, (s)he was forced to consider what it meant for a non-figural object such as a church to speak or be spoken to, encouraging active responses to sacred interiors and perhaps, for some readers, even challenging the hierarchical character of such spaces; though as the text does not change, this "challenge" is worded the same for each reader.

A final epigraphic strategy with classical roots is the so-called dialogue inscription (also called "question-and-answer," or *erotapokriseis*) that asks readers to voice prescribed questions out loud and then to answer them, often in the voice of the building and its decoration itself.[154] These dialogue inscriptions were not unique to sacred buildings in the period – indeed, the *Greek Anthology* preserves a number of them written for secular monuments, including Paul the Silentiary's dialogue inscription dedicated to Porphyrius the Charioteer – but the dialogue inscriptions composed for churches most often feature elements related to their Christian context.[155] In the Church of Ss. Peter and Paul at Gerasa, a three-line inscription installed around 540 at the east end of the pavement of the north aisle imagines a dialogue between readers as interrogators (shown in bold) and mosaic:

> **Ψηφίς, τίς σ΄ ἀνέθηκεν;** Ὁ δώματα ταῦτα τελέσσας.
> **Τίς δ΄ ὁ γραφεὶς ποιμήν; Τίνος εἵνεκα ἔργα πιφαύσκει;**
> Οὔνομ<α> Ἀναστάσιος [τ]ετράπτολις, ε̣[ὖ]χος ὁ Σωτήρ.
>
> **Mosaic, who dedicated you?** The one who paid for these dwellings.
> **And who is the shepherd who is depicted? Because of whom do these works shine?**
> His name is Anastasios, of the Tetrapolis, a vow, Savior.[156]

Strikingly, though written in the middle of the sixth century, the dialogue operates in a mode similar to that of some of the earliest dialogue epigrams from the

Hellenistic period, including an epigram by Posidippus of Pella that sets up a dialogue between the viewer and a sculpture (of "Opportunity" or "Right Time," *Kairos*), allowing the sculpture to praise its maker, Lysippos.[157] Late antique poets used Posidippus and his contemporaries as models, sometimes appearing to directly imitate their dialogic poems, as does the fourth-century writer Ausonius, who composes a Latin poem in which a (non-existent) statue of the goddess Opportunity (*Occasio*) proclaims herself to be by the famous Greek sculptor Phidias.[158] As readers read out their questions at Gerasa, they seem to be participating in an organic dialogue with the mosaic text, written on the floor, and an image – painted? in mosaic? – on the church's east wall, directly above the inscription. The layout of the inscription's line breaks helps to define the structure of question and response, and the "speaking mosaic" acts as a variant on the "speaking" building, vivifying the pavement so that it can respond, identifying a nearby portrait of the bishop Anastasios as the patron, which unfortunately does not survive.[159] The continued repetition of forms of the interrogative pronoun in the first and second lines – τίς, τίς, τίνος – guides the questioner as (s)he asks about the donor of the mosaic, encouraging him or her to probe further about the nature of this exceptional man, who not only paid for his own portrait, but for the entire building. However, while this conversation format may seem to be natural, echoing the ways in which visitors would have asked each other about the mosaic, the text is describing an ideal encounter and providing both questions *and* answers that the donor, Anastasios, wanted to convey to readers. Spontaneous and yet prescribed, the text also plays with the verb *graphein* – which, we have already seen, could suggest "painting" or "writing," or both.[160] When read aloud, the text forces the reader to assume the roles of passerby and of the work of art itself, simultaneously inviting continuous re-performance while permanently affixing the name of the patron, Anastasios, and the *ego* of his artwork to the pavement.

Dialogue inscriptions could ask and answer in the voice of the building or artwork, as does the Gerasa text, or just ask in the voice of an unidentified speaker, as does an epigram inscribed in a fourth- or fifth-century church in Rome, which puts words into the mouth of the reader: "You ask: 'Who has designated starry Olympus for the Lord?'"[161] Unfortunately, the last line or lines of the text are lost, but they likely would have declared the name of the patron (a prelate, *praesul*), who honors God by building a great church, prompting "you," the reader, to take an interest in the history of the building and its decoration. Another extant inscription, from the sixth-century Basilica of Bishop John at Sandanski (modern Popova in Bulgaria), dictates an even more specific response focused on the aesthetics of the interior: "Who built this marvellous work which delights the eyes with beauty, you want to know? [It is] John" (Figure 4.13).[162] The first line begins with the question, "who," while the third intensifies and answers said question: "you want to know? John." As the reader performs the text, (s)he is first required to praise the work as delightful and beautiful, before asking the logical question: "Who made this?" At Sandanski, and perhaps in the fragmentary example from Rome as well, the inscription employs direct address in order to dictate reading and response, allowing the reader to vocalize the text first for him- or herself, then pushing the

Figure 4.13 Question-and-answer inscription, pavement of the Basilica of Bishop John, Sandanski (modern Popova), Bulgaria, sixth century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Ivo Topalilov

reader to perform as an interpreter for those standing nearby, inscribing instant expertise as well as the expectation of interaction between text, patron, and the wider community of potential readers.

Ekphrastic buildings

Through their verbal strategies as texts, many of which are drawn from the genres of ekphrasis, inscriptions in late antique churches and other buildings engage with their audiences in ways that have not been sufficiently appreciated, using the dynamic language of movement and vision, and playing with voice to turn their readers into active participants within sacred (and secular) spaces.[163] Importantly, these strategies are not only verbal, but work sympathetically with the visual formats and spatial arrangements of the inscriptions, as in the texts arranged in circles in the churches of Constantinople, or the circular-shaped texts on the floors of churches in Arabia and Palestine. When we read these texts in context against the wider practice of ekphrasis in the period, it becomes

clear that these carved, painted, and mosaic inscriptions were meant not only to be read, and read aloud, but also to prompt responses from readers to specific images, parts of the building, or moments in particular rituals such as baptism or the liturgy. These responses often play with quotations from Greek and Roman texts, especially the works of Homer, as well as with classical modes of viewing, transforming classical tropes into Christian ones. Grounded in the very fabric of the architecture of major urban centers as well as more rural environs, the ekphrastic epigrams and prose inscriptions of the period appear to have been designed to aid their readers in constructing "proper" responses to the wonder-provoking experience of entering a church, but also to insert their own selves into the sacred and memorial fabric of the building.

Notes

1 On the mosaics, Kitzinger 1951a, 1977, 90; Maguire 1987a, 21–4; Talgam 2014, 215–18.

2 On the inscription, Kitzinger 1951a, 86–7; Agosti 2011–2012, 267–8, who gives the Greek text:

> Λίθον ἀπαστράπτοντα Θ(εο)ῦ χάριν ἔνθα κ(αὶ) ἔνθα
> ἐκ θεμέθλων τολύπευσε κ(αὶ) ἀγλαίην πόρε πᾶσαν
> Δουμέτιος περίπυστος, ἀμωμήτων ἱερήων
> ἀρχιερεὺς πανάριστος, ὅλης πάτρης μέγα φέγ[γος].
> Αὕτη ἡ πύλη τοῦ Κ(υρίο)υ, δίκαιοι εἰσέλθονται.

3 The first line is: Οἶκον ἀπαστράπτοντα Θ(εο)ῦ χάριν ἔνθα κ(αὶ) ἔνθα. A similar synecdoche of "stone" – "wall" occurs in the previously-discussed inscription from the Complex of Eustolios at Kourion: see Chapter 2.

4 For example, in the Gospel of Luke 10:18, 17:24 ("For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day"); and the equivalent passage in Matthew 24:27. While the phrase "here and there" (ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα) is not used, the sense is the same: in Luke, for example, it shines from one side of the sky to the other (ἐκ τῆς ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν εἰς τὴν ὑπ'οὐρανόν). These lines in a sense rewrite passages from the Old Testament vision of Ezekiel 1:4: "As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually . . ." (πῦρ ἐξαστράπτον).

5 Including the second-century CE works of Aelius Aristides (e.g. *Or.* 18.3, 18.6, 23.14): Thomas 2007, 288 n. 4; and Philostratus: Dubel 2009, 316. Practically identical language is found in contemporary sixth-century inscriptions, including the inscription from the church of Hagios Polyeuktos in Constantinople: see n. 61 in this chapter.

6 On the poet's use of the verb "flash" (ἀστράπτω), Peek 1968, cols. 208–9; on the verb's use by other late antique authors, Isager 1995, 213–14; Agosti 1997. The first line of the second Nikopolis inscription (λίθον ἀπαστράπτοντα . . .) directly echoes a speech by the suitor Lyaios in Book 42, who describes the neck of his beloved Beroë as outshining "a sparkling jewel": Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 42.424, trans. Rouse 1940, 258–9. Nonnus also uses the phrase "here and there" (ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα) frequently, including over sixty times in the *Dionysiaca*: Isager 1995, 213; Agosti 2007a, 46. The bibliography on Nonnus has expanded vastly of late: see especially Miguélez-Cavero 2008; Spanoudakis 2014; Accorinti 2016.

7 In fact, an amazement expressed in similar terms as in late Roman ekphraseis of architecture, such as that of Aelius Aristides: as Thomas 2007, 208, puts it, "For Aristides,

the experience of grand architecture at Smyrna or at Pergamon was like the sensation of a thunder-flash or lightning bolt."

8 The panel is framed by a single line border, a narrow border adorned with bead-and-reel ornament, a running spiral, and interlocking circles containing birds with ribbons around their necks: Kitzinger 1951a, 93–108.

9 Kitzinger 1951a; Maguire 1987a, 20–40, who cites more examples of what he terms the "earth and ocean" scheme; Agosti 2004–2005, 351–74, 2011–2012, 265–8.

10 Trans. Kitzinger 1951a, 100–1, with slight adaptations; also Pelekanides 1940.

11 E.g. Maguire 1987a, 22–4; also Maguire 1987b, reprinted in Maguire 1998. The phrase "everything that breathes and creeps" is found twice in Homer's works, in a speech by Zeus (*Iliad* 17.447) and a subsequent speech by Odysseus (*Odyssey* 18.131, pointed out by Kitzinger 1951a, 101 n. 76); both are delivered in the context of the supreme wretchedness of man among all the creations of the gods. This phrase appears to have been relatively popular in the period, as Gregory of Nazianzus uses it in reference to God's power to give voices to all things: *Carmina quae spectant ad alios* (*Carmina* 2.2.2), *PG* 37, col. 1528. Shenoute of Atripe, the abbot of the White Monastery in Upper Egypt, uses similar language in the early fifth century to describe negatively the forms of the hieroglyphs inscribed on Egyptian temples: Shenoute, *Acephalous Work* A6, ed. and trans. Young 2001, 354. The epithet "great-hearted" is used by Homer to describe Achilles, e.g. *Iliad* 20.498: see Kiilerich 2001, 57–9; for other epigraphic appearances of the term, Agosti 2007a, 42. On other Homeric inscriptions from churches in the eastern Mediterranean, Browning 1975, especially 22–34, who mentions sixth-century inscriptions at Eleutheropolis (Beit Jibrin) (*SEG* 8–243) and at El-Boberije in Samaria (*SEG* 8–119); also Agosti 2008a, 2011–2012, 2017a; more generally, Agosti 2005b, 2016a.

12 Isager 1995, 213–15, 1997, especially 29 n. 11; Agosti 2004–2005, 358, 2011–2012, 267. The mash-up of Homeric, Nonnian, and other elements is not surprising in a literary culture in which poetic forms like the *cento*, made up of lines from other poems, were popular: on these, see Chapter 2.

13 With the exception of Agosti, e.g. Agosti 2011–2012, 267–8.

14 Webb 2009, 1, 51–5; this definition is given by the first-century writer Theon in his educational treatise: Theon, *Progymnasmata* 118, 1.7. The secondary literature on ekphrasis is far too extensive to list here: as a start, see Elsner 2002; Zeitlin 2013; Squire 2015c.

15 Webb 2009, 14–17.

16 Elsner 2002; though Webb 2009, 1–2, rightly points out that descriptions of works of art were not the only kind of ekphrasis. However, Webb's view that we must treat Greek conceptions of ekphrasis as portrayed in the *Progymnasmata* separately from other ancient or modern ekphrastic texts does itself create an unnecessary, and artificial, boundary: see Squire 2008, 2015c.

17 Maguire 1974; James and Webb 1991; Webb 2007.

18 As Maguire 1974, 129, puts it, "A *topos* was not necessarily untrue"; generally see also Webb 2009.

19 Homer, *Iliad* 18.478–608. On the text, which has inspired a great deal of scholarship, Becker 1995, especially 101–6; Squire 2011, 320–1, 361–5, 2013a. This was not the first ekphrasis on a building to be inspired by Homer's description, which influenced authors such as Pliny the Younger and Quintilian: Thomas 2007, 216.

20 ἐν μὲν γαῖαν . . . ἐν δ᾽οὐρανόν, ἐν δὲ θάλασσαν: Homer, *Iliad*, 18.483.

21 Squire 2011, 364.

22 E.g. on the Gemma Augustea: Pollini 1993.

23 This particular acclamation was condemned by John Chrysostom as an exercise in vanity, e.g. *Address on Vainglory* 4, trans. Laistner 1951; also see Peterson 1929; Leyerle 2001, 37.

24 See e.g. Maguire 1987a.

25 See the discussion in Chapter 2.
26 An approach to images, among whose early proponents is Maguire 1987a.
27 The literature on the so-called "ekphrastic epigram" is large and ever-growing, and dominated by scholarship on Hellenistic epigrams: see especially Goldhill 1994; Bing 1998; Gutzwiller 1998, 2002; Männlein-Robert 2007a; Bing 2009; Squire 2009; Bruss 2010; Squire 2010a, 2010b, 2015c. The striking epigrams of Posidippus of Pella, first published in 2001, have especially drawn a good deal of attention: see Acosta-Hughes, Kosmetatou, and Baumbach 2004; Gutzwiller 2005; Männlein-Robert 2007a; Prioux 2008; Elsner 2014b. On Roman ekphrastic epigrams, Squire 2009, 202–38. On later Greek ekphrastic epigrams, the literature on which is growing rapidly, see especially Lauxtermann 1994, 56; Papalexandrou 2007; Drpić 2016a. There is a difference between ancient ekphrasis in poetry or prose and what is often referred to as the "ekphrastic epigram," as examples of the latter type of text tend to guide, comment upon, or complicate the viewing experience rather than to purely conjure up a sight in the mind's eye: on this distinction, Webb 2009, 1–11. The term "ekphrastic epigram" is much-debated: for discussions that reject the term, see Lauxtermann 1998, who argues the appellation is a modern one; Männlein-Robert 2007b, especially 252–3, who argues that the category "ekphrastic epigram" is flawed as these texts were inherently multi-genre.
28 Philostratus uses the same language of *technê* and *sophia* in the preface to his *Imagines*, trans. Fairbanks 1931, 2–3, with slight adaptations: "Whosoever scorns painting is unjust to truth; and he is also unjust to all the wisdom [*sophia*] that has been bestowed upon poets – for poets and painters make equal contributions to our knowledge of the deeds and the looks of heroes – and he withholds his praise from symmetry of proportion, through which art [*technê*] partakes of reason"; see Squire 2011, 102–21.
29 Agosti 2004–2005, 2011–2012, 2014. On the relationships between late antique ekphrasis and inscriptions in a different context, that of inscribed vessels, Meredith 2009, 2015; Leatherbury 2017b.
30 As opposed to the many epigrams from the Hellenistic period onwards, which were intended primarily for textual circulation alone; for example, the many epigrams devoted to Myron's famous sculpture of a cow: Squire 2010a; generally, also Gutzwiller 2002, 87.
31 A similar point is made by Agosti 2011–2012, 269.
32 On the issue of "imagined responses" presented by later Byzantine ekphrasis and ekphrastic epigrams, Maguire 1996a.
33 On earlier Roman epideictic speeches on site, Thomas 2007, 216–18, 229–35, who makes the point that these were so common "that few stood out sufficiently to survive in transmission." Earlier Christian ekphraseis include Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 10.4; on this passage, Smith 1989.
34 Chorikios, *Laudatio Marciani* 1–2, ed. Foerster 1929, 1–47, portions trans. Mango 1972a, 60–72; also Webb 2006. Laudatory comparisons such as this were not unusual in the period: an inscription from the Chalke (entrance vestibule) of the imperial palace in Constantinople, apparently put up by the emperor Anastasius in the late fifth or early sixth century, engages in a similar kind of comparison of the palace with the other great monuments of the world, including the pyramids at Giza and the *Pharos* (Lighthouse) of Alexandria: *AG* 9.656, trans. Paton 1917b, 363, 365.
35 Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis of St. Sophia*, ed. De Stefani 2011, 1–71. On the ekphrasis, Mary Whitby 1985a; Macrides and Magdalino 1988; Mary Whitby 2003; Schibille 2014; Pentcheva 2017, especially 121–49, who offers a particularly sensuous reading. Paul was no stranger to the epigram or to the classical tradition, as demonstrated by his many poems on mythological topics in Books 5–7 and 10 of the *Greek Anthology*: Yardley 1980; Mary Whitby 1985b; Martlew 1996.
36 Webb 1999, especially 59–60; these tropes are also common in earlier Roman ekphraseis, including those of Statius: Thomas 2015, 281.

37 Webb 1999; Limberis 2011, 59–62; also Maguire 1974; Nelson 2000b. Western writers of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries also authored similar ekphraseis in Latin, including Paulinus of Nola, Claudian, and Sidonius Apollinaris, among others: on these, a good starting point is Arnulf 2004, 51–81; also, on Sidonius's ekphrastic tendencies, especially his ekphrasis on the Lyon church, Lobato 2010, 2012; Leatherbury 2017b.

38 Procopius is probably the author most explicit about this in late antiquity: *On Buildings* 1.1.12–9, trans. Dewing and Downey 1940, 7–9; on this trope, Elsner 2007b.

39 Webb 1999, 65–8; on the ekphrasis as a multisensory description, Webb 2017.

40 Mary Whitby 1985a, who points out that Paul's ekphrasis was apparently performed partly in the Patriarchate (adjacent to the church) and partly in the Great Palace. The lack of a proper context for an ekphrasis could on occasion confuse the audience; for example, Libanios's claim that an ekphrasis of the Great Church at Antioch by the rhetor Bemarchios was confusing when it was performed for a second time outside of the church: Libanios, *Autobiography* 1.41, ed. and trans. Norman 1965, 39–41; on this text, Webb 1999, 62, 2009, 125–6.

41 Οἴξατέ μοι κληῖδα θεουδέες, οἴξατε, μύσται, οἴξατε δ'ἡμετέροισιν ἀνάκτορα θέσκελα μύθοις . . . : Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis* 350–1, ed. De Stefani 2011, 24; trans. Bell 2009, 206, adapted.

42 Schibille 2014, especially 43–96; on the mosaics and their restoration history, Teteriatnakov 2017.

43 See especially Webb 1999, 68–70; Isar 2004, 2006, 2011; Pentcheva 2014, 45–56, who draws heavily on the work of Isar; Schibille 2014, 43–96; Pentcheva 2017, 121–49, who focuses on liturgical hymns sung in the church; Papalexandrou 2017, who focuses instead on acclamations to the emperor and patriarch.

44 An inscription was put up in the apse in the ninth century along with the restoration of the image of the Virgin and Child in the apse, marking the end of Iconoclasm: the text no longer survives, but is preserved as *AG* 1.1, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 3; Lauxtermann 2003, 95–6. Only one manuscript, in Heidelberg, preserves the text of Paul's *Ekphrasis*; interestingly, the same manuscript preserves the text of the Palatine Anthology: Mary Whitby 2006, 168.

45 On Paul's "tour" of the building, see the useful diagram in Bell 2009, 207. The very end of the ekphrasis turns back to the patron, Justinian, and the Patriarch: *Ekphrasis* 921–1029, ed. De Stefani 2011, 63–71; trans. Bell 2009, 207–12.

46 This circularity is also emphasized by Procopius in his abbreviated ekphrasis of the church: Procopius, *On Buildings* 1.1.27–78. On this text, Averil Cameron 1996, 84–112; Webb 2000; Mary Whitby 2000, 56; Michael Whitby 2000; Kaldellis 2004, 115–17; Elsner 2007b; Turquois 2013, 22–69. On the symbolic connection between dome and vault of Heaven, which was not consistent in all of its particulars from pagan to Christian contexts, Lehmann 1945; Mathews 1982; Bogdanović 2017.

47 Macrides and Magdalino 1988.

48 Isar 2004, who emphasizes the Platonic (and Neo-Platonic) roots of Paul's rhetorical strategy of "progression and return (to the center)"; Isar 2006.

49 The impact of motion on the viewer's perception of the building is explicitly discussed by the patriarch Photios in the ninth century: Isar 2004, 224.

50 E.g. Paul the Silentiary, *Ekphrasis of the Ambo* 224–9, ed. De Stefani 2011, 84. Isar connects this description to Josephus's description of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, which is also constructed in cosmological terms: Isar 2006, 74. On this trope of marble as water, see Chapter 2.

51 Importantly, these descriptions and experiences of buildings in the round are from the same period as increasing popularity of circular and centrally planned churches in the eastern Mediterranean, at Antioch and other sites: most recently, Shalev-Hurvitz 2015.

52 E.g. mosaic inscriptions from the annex of the Cathedral Church at Madaba in Jordan, dated to the early seventh century: Sauvignac 1911; *I.Jordanie* 140; Piccirillo 1989a, 22, 1993, 116.

53 As in the mosaic dedicatory inscription of the Church of St. John the Baptist at Gerasa in Jordan, dated to 531: Welles 1938, 479–50, no. 306; Piccirillo 1989a, 38–41, 1993, 288–9; Schick 1995, 317–18. The dedicatory inscription of the Church of St. Christopher at Qabr Hiram in Lebanon, built in 575, now in the Musée du Louvre in Paris, features similar language: Froehner 1864, 309–11, nos. 269–74; Baratte 1978, 138; Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 412 fig. 402, 414.

54 As in the mosaic inscription from a church at al-Rashidiyah in Jordan, dated by inscription to 574: Mahamid 2003; Feissel and Gatier 2005, no. 555; Di Segni 2006, 587–8; *SEG* 53–1884.

55 As in the mosaic inscription in the central nave in the Church of the Virgin at Madaba built in the mid-eighth century: *I.Jordanie* 130; Rhoby 2009*,* 394–5; for an extended discussion, see Chapter 6.

56 As in Old St. Peter's in Rome, where an inscription in the apse, probably put up in the mid-fourth century by Constantius, son of Constantine, read, "This which you see is the seat of justice, the house of faith, the hall of chastity . . ." (*Iustitiae sedis, fidei domus, aula pudoris, haec est quam cernis* . . .): *CIL* 6, 10; *ICUR* 2, 21, 47, 345; *ILCV* 1, nos. 1752–3; Krautheimer 1987; Henck 2001; Bowersock 2005; Bardill 2012, 243–6. For the view that Constantine himself finished the church, Ruysschaert 1967–1968; Liverani 2008. Interestingly, a copycat inscription appears on an arcade at Henchir Adjedj in Algeria, probably carved at some point in the sixth century: *CIL* 8, 10698; Hamdoune 2016, 217, Annexe 11.

57 As in the Baptistery of the Great Basilica at Tipasa in Algeria, in the context of a heavenly vision: the inscription is *CIL* 8, 209; also published by de Pachtère 1911, 90, nos. 373–4; Gui, Duval, and Caillet 1992, 21–4.

58 On the different ways that sight was theorized in antiquity, Squire 2015b.

59 Interestingly, early examples of ekphraseis physically connected to the objects or spaces that they describe are rare, especially when compared to the number from the late antique period: Goldhill 2012, 91–2.

60 For example, Koortbojian 1996; Laurence and Newsome 2011; Jenkyns 2013, 143–92; Östenberg, Malmberg, and Bjørnebye 2015. On the Byzantine epigram and movement more specifically, Papalexandrou 2001, 2007; Drpić 2016a, 212–19.

61 On liturgical motion in churches, Mathews 1971; Baldovin 1987; Doig 2008. Very little work has been done on "extra-liturgical" uses of late antique churches, but see Marinis 2014a, 100–13, who points to later Byzantine uses of churches such as private prayer, incubation, and other visits to churches for divine healing, memorials for the dead, shared meals, and festivals.

62 The later title for the text explains that they were literally "written around in a circle" (κύκλῳ περιγράφονται) in the church: *AG* 1.10, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 10–11. Several possible arrangements have been proposed for the text: Connor 1999, who argues that Anicia Juliana composed the poem herself; Bardill 2006. On the visual dimensions and character of the poem, Harrison 1986, 5–8, 117–21 (on the measurements of extant fragments), 406; Harrison 1989, 33–41, 84–9; Connor 1999; Mary Whitby 2006; Angelova 2014, 229–31.

63 Connor 1999; Mary Whitby 2006, 167–8; also discussed by Schibille 2014, 148–9.

64 James 2007b.

65 *AG* 1.10.42–76, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 15–17.

66 *AG* 1.10.70–3, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 17; on the mosaic, Milner 1994.

67 James 2007b, 190–1.

68 ποῦ γὰρ Ἰουλιανὴν ἁγίοις οὐκ ἔστιν ἰδέσθαι νὴον ἀναστήσασαν ἀγακλέα: *AG* 1.10.22, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 13. The second section seems to have been written to be read after the first, which contains the "backstory" of the building; but due to the thematic continuity between the two halves, the poem is still understandable if the two are switched.

69 On lengthy verse inscriptions, Agosti 2008b.

70 Interestingly, unlike Anicia Juliana's inscription, this inscription was never anthologized in antiquity; it was edited most recently by Mercati 1925, 205; and trans. Mango 1972b, 190; also an earlier translation by van Millingen 1912, 73, and fig. 20:

> Ἄλλοι μὲν βασιλῆες ἐτιμήσαντο θανόντας
> ἀνέρας, ὧν ἀνόνητος ἔην πόνος· ἡμέτερος δὲ
> εὐσεβίην σκηπτοῦχος Ἰουστινιανὸς ἀέξων
> Σέργιον αἰγλήεντι δόμωι θεράποντα γεραίρει
> Χριστοῦ παγγενέταο· τὸν οὐ πυρὸς ἀτμὸς ἀνάπτων,
> οὐ ξίφος, οὐχ ἑτέρη βασάνων ἐτάραξεν ἀνάγκη,
> ἀλλὰ θεοῦ τέτληκεν ὑπὲρ Χριστοῖο δαμῆναι
> αἵματι κερδαίνων δόμον οὐρανόν. Ἀλλ᾽ ἐνὶ πᾶσιν
> κοιρανίην βασιλῆος ἀκοιμήτοιο φυλάξοι
> καὶ κράτος αὐξήσειε θεοστεφέος Θεοδώρης,
> ἧς νόος εὐσεβίηι φαιδρύνεται, ἧς πόνος αἰεὶ
> ἀκτεάνων θρεπτῆρες ἀφειδέες εἰσὶν ἀγῶνες.

On the text, Bardill 2000; Croke 2006, 46–62; Garipzanov 2018, 160–75, who discusses the competing monograms of Anicia Juliana (at Hagios Polyeuktos) and Justinian and Theodora (at Ss. Sergius and Bacchus), which also ring the interiors of the two churches.

71 Connor 1999, 511–12; Bardill 2000, 4; Shahîd 2003; Croke 2006, 50–3.

72 The paten, now in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (acc. no. 57.644) is Mundell Mango 1986, 78–80, cat. no. 4. On apotropaic architectural inscriptions, Leatherbury 2016a; Milwright 2016. Similar apotropaic functions have been argued for texts that encircle later Byzantine churches, e.g. Walker 2015, 106–9; and for western medieval inscriptions, e.g. Weinryb 2011, 322–3.

73 τοῦ ἁγίου Σεργίου· ὑπὲρ μνήμης Βαραδάτου υἱοῦ Ἡλιοδόρου: Mundell Mango 1986, 78.

74 On the physicality of reading texts inscribed onto silver supports, Leatherbury, 2017b; on similar encircling inscriptions on icon frames, Pentcheva 2014, 155–6; on reliquaries, Drpić 2016a; Hostetler 2016.

75 The inscription is *SGO* 22/35/02, trans. Agosti 2008a, 202–3, with slight adaptations:

> Εὔχεο νῦν πρώτιστα καὶ εὐξάμενος πάλιν <ἀθρεῖ>·
> τέρπεο ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδὼν πολυδαίδαλα ἔργα
> νηοῦ τειμήεντος ὃν ἀκαμάτοισιν ἐπ᾽ἔργοις
> Κάσσιος Ἠπιόδωρος ἐπίσκοπος αἴσιμα εἰδὼς
> σπουδῇ καὶ ταχύτητι ὑποστὰς ἐξετέλεσσεν
> Πατρὶ Θεῷ καὶ παιδὶ καὶ ἁγίῳ πνεύματί τε ξύν.
> Οἷος δ᾽ἐκ δαπέδου κλυτοεργὸς ἤραρε κόσμος
> ἐκταδὸν ἀργεννῆσι φαινόμενος πλακέεσσι,
> κείοσιν εὐρύθμοις ἀμφισταδόν· ἐνθάδε πάντες
> εὐχὰς ὁμοῦ τελέουσιν ὅσοι Χριστὸν δοκέουσιν·
> νηοῦ δ᾽αὖ μετόπισθεν ἐπ᾽αὐχένι πείονι γαίης
> πύργους ἀστερόεντας ἐδείματο καλλιθεμείλους·
> οἱ μὲν ἴσοις κανόνεσσιν ἀπ᾽ἀλλήλων βεβαῶτες
> διπλόοι ἐξ ὁμόθεν γλυπτοὺς ἀνέχουσι τένοντας
> τῶν δὲ μάλ᾽ἀγλαίη πολυήρατον εἶδος ἔχουσας
> Πνεύματος ἐξ ἁγίου πελιάδας ἀμφὶς ἀνέλκ[ει].

For the earlier edition and information on the church, Donceel 1987; Magnelli 2007, especially 40.

76 On the Nonnian elements, Agosti 2008a, 2010b, 170–1.

77 Donceel 1987, who argues that the hanging doves are silver objects meant to symbolize the presence of the Holy Spirit, such as an example from the Syrian Attarouthi Treasure preserved in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (acc. no. 1986.3.15): Evans and Ratliff 2012, 42–3, cat. no. 22N.
78 On the Marble Court, Yegül 1986, 45–66, 152–68.
79 Foss 1986, 171–2; also Yegül 1986, 48–9.
80 Yegül 1986, 48; Foss 1986, 170. On this visual strategy, see Chapter 2.
81 Ed. and trans. Foss 1986, 170–2:

> [--- θαῦμ]α μ᾽ἔχει πόθεν ἔργον [---]ΑΤΟ γαῖα
> [δώμ]ατος ὑ[ψ]ορόφου χρυσαυγέος ἀπλέτ[ου ---]
> [---]ΡΟΝΙ ΒΟΥ [---]ΕΣΚΕΠ [---]τὸ γῆ[ρ]ας
> Μ[εμ]νόνιος πάτρης γενέτη[ς] νῦ[ν]
> ὡς ἴδεν ὡς κόσμ[ησε --- αὐ]τίκα τεῦξεν (vac)
> κόσμον ἀεὶ ζώον[τ]α τὸν οὐ φθόνος οἶ[δεν ---]
> ὥπασε δ᾽εὐρὺ θέμιλον ἀναπτύξας [---]
> αἰέν ὀπιπεθε [---]ΙΝ[---]ΧΡΥΣ[---]
> + ἀνενεώθη ἡ χρυσόφορ[ος ---] τῆς πόλεως ἰνδ(ικτίονι) η΄μηνὶ Ἰουλίῳ οὕτως σκούτλω[σιν]
> στρώσε(ις) δὲ τοῦ ἐδ[άφους ---]ιν δίχα τοῦ μουσίου καὶ τῶν ἄλλ[ων ---]

82 While the restoration of "wonder" (θαῦμα) is tentative, this phrase and variants are found elsewhere in earlier Greek literature, including Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 688.
83 Dunbabin 1989. Late antique bath inscriptions in both Greek and Latin commonly emphasize the glory of the building, especially its size, height, and golden decoration, as well as attempt to drive envy (φθόνος in Greek, *invida* in Latin) and evil forces away. These include mosaic inscriptions from baths at Serdjilla in Syria, dated to 473: Prentice 1908, 190–5; and at Ain Témouchent in Algeria, where the text is paired with an apotropaic or protective mask of Ocean: the inscription is published by de Pachtère 1911, 75 no. 318; Hamdoune 2016, 161–3; and on the mosaics, Dunbabin 1978, 151–2, pl. 143.
84 Yegül 1986, 76.
85 As in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, encountered previously in Chapter 2: Schibille 2014, 171–98; on the Platonic roots of this concept, Hernández de la Fuente 2011.
86 As in San Vitale in Ravenna: Dresken-Weiland 2016, 217–26. On the circular arrangement of portraits of saints, Yasin 2009, 259–71.
87 On the role of geometric mosaics in guiding motion, Donkin 2005; Molholt 2011.
88 E.g. Papalexandrou 2001; Walker 2015. On similar encircling inscriptions from churches in early medieval Armenia, Maranci 2008. On Umayyad and Abbasid inscriptions that adopt similar formats, including the Qurʾanic inscription that rings the interior of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, Milwright 2016, 172–213. On ekphrasis and movement in later Islamic inscriptions, Bierman 1998; Blessing 2013.
89 The evidence for circumambulation of the Holy Sepulchre within the Anastasis rotunda on Holy Saturday is first presented in a Georgian source dated from the fifth to the eighth centuries: Milwright 2016, 258. On circumambulation of the Rock and the Kaʿba, Shalev-Hurvitz 2015, 314.
90 Thomas 2007, 299, italics added for emphasis. On the difference between encouraged reactions and spontaneous ("real") ones in the Hellenistic period, Gutzwiller 2002, 98.
91 On Roman and late antique appreciation of architecture generally, Thomas 2007, especially 207–20; Thomas 2014b, 2015.
92 Robert 1948, 66–70; Gutzwiller 2002, 96–7; Agosti 2011–2012, 255–9; Thomas 2007, 210–13. On the role of wonder in Greek and Roman literature more generally, Porter 2010; Hunzinger 2015. Wonder is a frequent trope in the epigrams of Posidippus: see most recently Elsner 2014b; on the epigrams, also *supra* n. 27.

93 The inscription is *SGO* 21/23/03; on the text, Moralee 2006; Agosti 2010b, 170–1, 2011–2012, 255–7.

94 [θαυμ]άζοντες πάντες ἔλεγον λάκκος ἐν λάκκῳ ὦ τοῦ [θαύ]ματος: *I.Jordanie* 135; Piccirillo 1989a, 29, 1993*,* 116. For the Aramaic- or Syriac-speaking visitor, a nearby inscription in the same courtyard repeats the prescribed phrase, "a cistern within a cistern" in Christian Palestinian Aramaic written in Greek script, *goubba bagoubba*: *I.Jordanie* 136–7; Piccirillo 1989a, 30.

95 Ὁρῶν / Λεοντίου τοῦ ἱερέως / τὸ πρᾶον θαύμαζε τῶν / κτισμάτων κ(αὶ) τῶν πόνων τὴν / ἀρετήν: *I.Jordanie*, 140; Piccirillo 1989a, 22, 1993*,* 116.

96 The inscription is *ICUR* 2, 24, 111; *ILCV* 1, no. 1778; Thunø 2011a.

97 Dunbabin 1989; Agosti 2010b. On the epigraphic insistence on the importance of brightness and glittering surfaces in church interiors, see Chapter 2.

98 So the shield of Achilles is a "wonder" (θαῦμα): Homer, *Iliad* 18.549; while another divinely crafted object, is "a wonder to behold" (θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι): *Iliad* 5.725. On these passages, see Prier 1989, 84–97; Elsner 2002; Neer 2010, 57–70.

99 Thomas 2007, 210; also Gutzwiller 2002, 96–7; Hunzinger 2015.

100 Ἔγνως, ὦ παῖ, ταῦτα Ὁμήρου ὄντα ἢ οὐ πώποτε ἔγνωκας δηλαδὴ θαῦμα ἡγούμενος . . . ; συμβάλωμεν οὖν ὅ τι νοεῖ . . . : Philostratus, *Imagines* 1.1, trans. Fairbanks 1931, 7. The painting described apparently depicts the battle between Hephaestus and the river god Scamander, who fought on the side of the Trojans. On the text, see especially Boeder 1996, 317–70; Elsner 2000a; Leach 2000; Newby 2009; Squire 2013c; generally, also Miles 2017; Grethlein 2017, 18–24.

101 On the passage, Webb 2009, 172–4.

102 ἀλλὰ τοῖς μὲν ἀπόχρη τὸ κοινὸν τοῦτο, ἰδεῖν μόνον καὶ περιβλέψαι καὶ τὼ ὀφθαλμὼ περιενεγκεῖν καὶ πρὸς τὴν ὀροφὴν ἀνακῦψαι καὶ τὴν χεῖρα ἐπισεῖσαι καὶ καθ᾽ ἡσυχίαν ἠσθῆναι δέει τοῦ μὴ ἂν δυνηθῆναι ἄξιόν τι τῶν βλεπομένων εἰπεῖν, ὅστις δὲ μετὰ παιδείας ὁρᾷ τὰ καλά, οὐκ ἄν, οἶμαι, ἀγαπήσειεν ὄψει μόνῃ καρπωσάμενος τὸ τερπνὸν οὐδ᾽ἂν ὑπομείναι ἄφωνος θεατὴς τοῦ κάλλους γενέσθαι, τειράσεται δὲ ὡς οἷον τε καὶ ἐνδιατρῖψαι καὶ λόγῳ ἀμείψασθαι τὴν θέαν: Lucian, *De Domo* 2–3, trans. Harmon 1913, 177–9. On this text, Boeder 1996, 113–35; Newby 2002; Thomas 2007, who connects this to the concept of the sublime articulated by Longinus and others; Newby 2016, 147–9.

103 Lucian, *De Domo* 17, trans. Harmon 1913, 193–5.

104 Lucian, *De Domo* 21, trans. Harmon 1913, 199. While Lucian simultaneously embraces and challenges the possibilities of ekphrasis, his successor Philostratus offers up his deeper concerns about the expressive powers of art itself: "Wonder and awe [ἔκπληξις] often frustrates Imitation [μίμησιν], but nothing will frustrate Imagination [φαντασίαν] as it goes imperturbably towards its own appointed purpose": Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 6.19, trans. Jones 2005–2006, 155–7; on the text, Elsner 2000b, reprinted as Chapter 1 in Elsner 2007c, 1–26.

105 See especially Turquois 2013, 22–69, who connects *thauma* to *aporia*, the confusion and difficulties experienced when the viewer tries to process their experience or to translate it into words; also Pentcheva 2017. Neer 2010, 67–8, presents *thauma* as a reaction to duality and contradiction rather than as *aporia*: "*thauma* is not *aporia*, in the literal sense of having 'no passageway,' but a mute indecision in the face of two alternatives that seem mutually exclusive but in fact are not."

106 On these different rhetorical strategies, Becker 1995; Newby 2009, 326–7.

107 Εὔχεο νῦν πρώτιστα καὶ εὐξάμενος πάλιν <ἀθρεῖ·> / τέρπεο φθαλμοῖσιν ἰδὼν πολυδαίδαλα ἔργα: see *supra* n. 75.

108 Ἀλλὰ τί εἴπω, ἢ τί λαλῆσω; Ἐκπλήττει γάρ με τὸ θαῦμα: John Chrysostom, *Homily on Christmas Morning (In natalem Christi diem)*, *PG* 56, 389. While Chrysostom does not refer to the Virgin's womb as a "cistern" (λάκκος), the later Church Father Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. 638) does, in his *Homily on the Nativity of Christ,* ed. Usener 1886.

109 Clergymen both east and west complained about the problem of the rowdy congregation: Maxwell 2006, 97; Bailey 2016, 130–2.
110 Petridiou 2013, who describes acts of ritual viewing at the sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis in Greece.
111 On *thauma* and epiphanic viewing in the Graeco-Roman world, Platt 2011, 56–7; Squire 2013c.
112 For a detailed discussion of prayer inscriptions, see Chapter 6.
113 Jensen 2011a, 184–8, with further bibliography; Jensen 2011b; Dölger 1930; Cuscito 2001. On the ritual of baptism, Jensen 2011a, 127–78. A lengthy text, probably once inscribed on the dome or around the font of the baptistery of San Giovanni at the church of Santa Tecla, Milan, combines this type of practical advice about ritual ("Let whoever wishes to shed their shameful lives' transgressions wash their hearts here") with the symbolic participation of Christ in the service: Jensen 2011a, 195–8, with further bibliography; the inscription, possibly composed by Ambrose himself, is preserved in the Vatican, *Palatino Latin Codex* 833; *CIL* 5, 617, 2; *ICUR* 2, 1, 161 no. 2; Banterle et al. 1994, 145–66; Lubian 2014.
114 Dölger 1930, 258; Jensen 2011a, 67–70.
115 *CIL* 8, 20911; de Pachtère 1911, 90, no. 373–4; Gui, Duval, and Caillet 1992, 21–4; Hamdoune 2016, 191–2.
116 *S(an)c(t)o beatissimo Cypriano / episcopo antiste / cum s(an)c(t)o Adelfio presbitero / huisce unitatis / Aquinius et Iuliana eius cum / Villa et Deogratias prolibus / tes(s)ellu aequori perenni posuerunt*: Cortois 1955; Cintas and Duval 1958; Duval 1982, vol. 1, 54–8; Ristow 1998, 260, no. 728; Jensen 2011a, 213–16.
117 Kostof 1965, 59–61; Deichmann 1974, 28–30; Deliyannis 2010, 95.
118 Other examples include an inscription from a room in a building next to the sixth-century Church of St. Theodore at Gerasa in Jordan, where a mosaic inscription in the pavement speaks in first person, labeling part of the church "the most happy place [χαριέστατός . . . τόπος] of the second order of the male hymn-singers [ὑμνολόγων ἀνδρῶν]": Yale University Art Gallery 1932.1736; see Welles 1938, 478, no. 303; Kondoleon 2014, 226.
119 *[L]iminaque sancta pedibus contingere laeta / omnis sacra canens, sacramento manus porrigere gaudens*: The mosaic is not extant, but the text is preserved as *CIL* 8, 20903; de Pachtère 1911, 95–6, no. 397, 4; Gui, Duval, and Caillet 1992, 32–7, no. 9, Tipasa, 6; Hamdoune 2016, 192–5; also Duval and Pietri 1997, 388; Yasin 2009, 97–8, figs. 2.23–4. On anti-Arian sentiment in the text, Ferrua 1991, 136–7, no. 130.
120 While more common in eastern mosaics (especially at Antioch), personifications feature in the mosaics of the sixth-century churches at Qasr el-Lebia and Ras el-Hilal in Cyrenaica, built after the Justinianic reconquest of the province: Alföldi-Rosenbaum and Ward-Perkins 1980, 40–1, 140–1; also Chick 2014a, 2014b.
121 Duval 1970; Gui, Duval, and Caillet 1992, 96–8, no. 27; Hamdoune 2016, 147–66, who presents the last word of line fifteen as *c(r)ismae*, "(sacrament) of unction." On the relationship between the Tipasa and Djemila texts, which has gone largely unexamined, Frend 1997; and briefly, Cooley 2012, 235. On Donatism, Frend 1952; Tilley 1997, 130–74; Dossey 2010, 173–94. "Donatist" appears to have been a catch-all term for non-Orthodox groups of Christians in North Africa; for a more critical view of the identities of various so-called Donatist groups, Shaw 1992. On hints of similar doctrinal conflicts in southern Arabia between anti-Chalcedonians and Chalcedonians in mosaic inscriptions, Gatier 2003.
122 One of the most famous "speaking" epigrams from the eighth century is that of "Nestor's Cup," a ceramic cup found at Pithekoussai on the Italian island of Ischia but produced by a Greek artist: Hansen 1983, no. 454. The Hellenistic period saw a vast expansion in poetic experiments with voice: see especially Burzachechi 1962; Day 1994; Petrovic 2005; Männlein-Robert 2007a, 2007b; Tueller 2008; Squire 2013b.

123 *CEG* 24; see Svenbro 1993, originally published as Svenbro 1988; Steiner 2001, 14–15, 258–9; Squire 2009, 151–3; Wachter 2010.
124 Svenbro 1993, 8–25.
125 See especially the discussion of Liverani 2014, who constructs a typology of speaker-audience interactions, which he relates to the visual strategies of portraits; also Agosti 2010b, 2015a. On the tendency of epigrams to "compensate" for their writtenness by "designating a speaker, addressee, etc.," Tueller 2008, 141.
126 On these developments, see especially Boeder 1996. On later Byzantine examples of similar types of epigrams, Drpić 2016a.
127 On voice in late antique epigrams, Agosti 2005a; Liverani 2014, 3–32.
128 Chorikios, *Laudatio Marciani* 1–2, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig 1929. On the modeling of ekphrasis after classical *periegesis*, Webb 1999, 65–8, 2009, 54–5.
129 Some late antique texts, especially the accounts of pilgrims to the Holy Land, imply the presence of tour guides who were tasked with helping visitors to sacred sites remember the biblical narrative connected to the site: see e.g. Johnson 2016b.
130 In addition to building inscriptions, funerary inscriptions continue in some cases to be composed in the first person in the late Roman period and late antiquity; for example, the oft-studied epitaph of Abercius, dated to the late second century CE and inscribed on his tombstone at Hierapolis in Asia Minor: Dölger 1922, vol. 2, 454–507; Guarducci 1971; Wischmeyer 1980; Merkelbach 1997; M. Mitchell 2008; Thonemann 2012; These first-person inscriptions are less common in later Byzantium: Nelson 2007, 107–9; though see Drpić 2014.
131 Now in the National Museum of Antiquities in Algiers: *CIL* 8, 8509; de Pachtère 1911, 75, no. 318; Dunbabin 1978, 151–2, 268, pl. 143. Another example from a Roman villa in Ténès, in Algeria, reports in the first person that the patron can see the roofs of other houses as well as the sea, a brash assertion of the prominence of his own house disguised as an innocent observation, which would have been echoed and confirmed by visitors when they read it: *CIL* 8, 21510. Similar inscriptions occur in eastern contexts as well; for example, the "speaking" donor Tiberius Iulius Septimius Iulianus, who declares that he paid for the mosaic decoration of the Baccheion at Smyrna: *I.Smyrna* 733; Scheibelreiter 2006, no. 2; Scheibelreiter-Gail 2011, 381, cat. 135, pl. 609.
132 A term used by Drpić 2016a, 70.
133 Τοῖς σοῖς θεράπουσιν ἡ θεράπαινα προσφέρω / Σοφία τὸ δῶρον. Χριστέ, προσδέχου τὰ σά,/ καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ μου μισθὸν Ἰουστῖνῳ δίδου,/ νίκας ἐπὶ νίκαις κατὰ νόσων καὶ βαρβάρων: *AG* 1.11, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 12–13.
134 On votive dedication in late antiquity, see especially Engemann 1995; Witt 2006; Vikan 2010. The inscription identifies the gift as something that belongs to Christ already (Χριστέ, προσδέχου τὰ σά . . .), a rhetorical move based on Chronicles 29:14 that had been incorporated into the liturgy by the sixth century: see Bradshaw 1997, 220–1; Pentcheva 2014, 256 n. 78. Other examples of inscriptions speaking in the voice of their donors include the mosaic dedication from the so-called Basilica E at Knidos, in Greece: "I, Cleopatra, *femina clarissima,* having made a vow, decorated [the church] with mosaic": *I.Knidos* 243; Scheibelreiter 2006, no. 22; Scheibelreiter-Gail 2011, 299–300, Abb. 366.
135 *Virgo Maria, tibi Xystus nova tecta dicavi digna . . . munera*: The inscription was destroyed in later restorations of the mosaic program, but is preserved in *ICUR* 2, 71; *ILCV* 1, no. 976.
136 Other Christian dedications to Mary preserve some of the same sense of humility evident in the Santa Maria Maggiore inscription, including an inscribed door lintel from a church or monastic building dedicated to Mary at Ramsaniyye in the Golan Heights, which reads, "I built the mountain monastery [ὀρομόνιον], Mary; it is your church": Gregg and Urman 1996, 189–90, no. 156.
137 On re-performance of dedications in Archaic and classical Greece, Day 1994; Dey 2014.

138 An exception is one of the dedicatory inscriptions of the fourth-century synagogue at Smyrna, which records the donation of seven *solidi* by "I, Irenopoios": *CII* 2.739; Lifshitz 1967, 22–3, no. 14.

139 An aspect of human-divine relationships poked at by a third-century BCE epigram attributed to Callimachus: "You know that you have received the debt, Asclepius, which Akeson owed you by his vow for his wife Demodike; but if you were to forget and claim it again, this tablet declares that it will bear witness": *AG* 6.147, trans. Paton 1916, 375, adapted. On the dual human and divine audiences for dedications, focused on the later Byzantine period, Drpić 2016a, 98–9.

140 Vincent 1922; Abel 1924; Avi-Yonah 1933, 147, no. 23, 8 *SEG* 8–243:

> Χριστοῦ παμβασιλῆος
> ἐκόσμησα τὸ μέλαθρον
> οὖδας ὁδὸν ψηφῖσιν ἰδίων
> διὰ μαθητῶν
> τοῦδ΄ ἱερεὺς ἀμύμων
> Ὀβοδιανὸς ἠπιόθυμος.

141 E.g. *Odyssey* 1.232; the same term is used to describe Antilochus, son of Nestor: *Odyssey* 3.111. The Three Fates are described as "gentle (ἠπιόθυμοι) powers" in *Orphic Hymns* 59.15, trans. Athanassakis and Wolkow 2013, 48–9.

142 The patron is described as "blameless" in the mosaic dedicatory inscription of the so-called "Thanksgiving Basilica" at Arkasas in Greece, built in the late fourth or early fifth century: "I, blameless presbyter . . ." (Ἐγὼ [ἄμ]εμπτος πρεσβύτερος . . .): Pelekanides and Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1974, 54, no. 16, with further bibliography.

143 Feissel 1983, 97–8, no. 103a; Nasrallah 2010; James 2011b. On the mosaic generally, Diehl 1932; Wisskirchen 1996; Bergmeier 2014. On female patrons in Byzantium, Angelova 2014; Theis, Mullett, and Grunbart 2014.

144 Νηὸς ἐγὼ κύδιστος Ἰουστίνοιο ἄνακτος / καί μ΄ ὕπατος Θεόδορος, ὁ καρτερός, ὁ τρὶς ὕπαρχος,/ ἄνθετο καὶ βασιλῆϊ, καὶ υἱέϊ παμβασιλῆος,/ Ἰουστινιανῷ, στρατιῆς ἡγήτορι πάσης: *AG* 1.97, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 40–1, with slight adaptations. The *Greek Anthology* reports that the inscription was "ἐν τῇ Μελίτῃ," designating a neighborhood of Constantinople (rather than the island of Malta): Brown 1975, 74; Martindale 1980, 1096.

145 Ἔργον ὁρᾷς περίπυστον Ἰουστίνου βασιλῆος, Ἰουστινιανοῦ . . . τοῦτο κάμεν Θεόδωρος ἀοίδιμος . . . : *AG* 1.98, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 42–3.

146 *AG* 1.12, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 12–13; also *AG* 1.13–7, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 19, 21. On the church, located in the district of Olybrius, Mango and Ševčenko 1961, 244; Janin 1969, 124–6; Brubaker 1997. A later inscription from the late sixth-century baptistery at Horvat Beʾer Shema in modern Israel modifies this formula, "This is the house of the Trinity, which was built by villagers in the time when Halladios occupied the (episcopal) seat of Gerrar": Gazit and Lender 1991, 1992; Tzaferis 1996, 76–7, no. 2; Feissel and Gatier 1997, no. 659.

147 Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 11, no. 2; Birnbaum and Ovadiah 1990; Ovadiah 1998, fig. 5: + Ἀμβροσίης τελέθω καὶ [νέκταρος οἶκο]ς ἀρείων / καὶ με Μαρῖνος ἔτευξε, θεὸ[ν κλυτόμ]ητιν (α)[ἴρ]ων / [μυσ]τικὸν ἀχράαντον ἀεὶ νόον ἡνιοχεύων. On Homeric hexameter verse in other church inscriptions in late antique Palestine, Browning 1975; Agosti 2005b, 2017a.

148 Homer, *Odyssey* 5.92–3.

149 Crowfoot 1929; Welles 1938, nos. 299–300.

150 The exact nature of the "former eyesore" of the pagan past is unclear, and popular suggestions have been one of the pagan temples of the city, perhaps the temple under the adjacent Cathedral or the central Temple of Artemis, or a rubbish dump for the carcasses of animals sacrificed at a nearby temple: Moralee 2006, 193.

151 The inscription is edited by Jones in Crowfoot 1929, 22; Welles 1938, no. 300, pl. CXXIX, a; also Yasin 2009, 196–7; translated by Moralee 2006, 193: + Ἄχραντο[ς] δόμος εἰμί ἀεθλοφόρου Θεοδώρου, μάρτυρος ἀθανάτου, θεοειδέος οὗ κλέος ἔπτη ἐν χθονὶ κ(αὶ) πόντῳ / καὶ τέρμασιν ὠκεανοῖο. Σῶμα γὰρ ἐν γαίῃ, ψυχὴ δ' εἰς οὐρανὸν εὐρύν, ἀγγελικῆς μετὰ πότμον ἀεὶ μετέχουσα χορείης. Recently, also Raja 2015.

152 A phrase used twice by Homer, once in *Iliad* 3.364 to describe the heaven to which Menelaus turns after his sword breaks to ask Zeus for justice against Paris; and again in *Odyssey* 19.40, when Telemachus wonders about the source of the miraculous bright light which has appeared in front of him and Odysseus in the hall at Ithaka; noted by Moralee 2006, 193.

153 As pointed out by Moralee 2006, 195–6.

154 On dialogue inscriptions, which appear to begin in the Hellenistic period, Männlein-Robert 2007b, 260–5; Tueller 2008; Agosti 2010b; Squire 2010b; Kauppinen 2015, who focuses on linguistic analysis. On question-and-answer literature generally, called *quaestiones et responsiones* in the Roman period and *erotapokriseis* in later Byzantine culture, Volgers and Zamagni 2004; Papadoyannakis 2006; Goldhill 2008; Averil Cameron 2014, 20; Cameron and Gaul 2017. The question-and-answer technique was widely used in the classical educational system: Cribiore 2001, 209–12.

155 The inscription is *AG* 7.307; on these, see Alan Cameron 1973.

156 Welles 1938, 485, no. 330; *SGO* 21/23/06. The "Tetrapolis" of the inscription may refer to a league of cities in Syria; alternatively, Agosti presents a slightly different edition of the text, reconstructing the middle of the third line as [Π]έτρα πτόλις, "of the city of Petra": Agosti 2010b, 170.

157 The poem has most recently been edited by Austin and Bastianini 2002, no. 142; *AG* 16.275; on the poem, Gutzwiller 2002, 95–6; Goldhill 2012, 105–11; on similar epigrams, Squire 2009, 161–5.

158 Ausonius, *Epigrams* 12; on this poem and its playful relationship to the earlier poem by Posidippus, Elsner 2002, 10–12.

159 The text probably referred to a fresco or, alternatively, to a mosaic on the wall: Welles 1938, 485.

160 See the discussion in Chapter 1.

161 *Quaeris: Quis Domino astriferum signavit [Olympum]*. The location and specific dedication of the church remains unknown, but its inscription is preserved in a medieval codex: *ICUR* 2, 248; *ILCV* 1, no. 1764.

162 Τίς ἔτευξε θέσκελον ἔργον / καλλονῇ ὄμματ΄ εὐφρε͂νον / ποθῖς μαθῖν; Ἰωάννης . . . : Beševliev 1964, 171, no. 239; Hoddinott 1975, 288–9; Popova 1981, 173–81; Kolarik 2001, 1255–67.

163 After Elsner 2002.

5 Embedding texts into images

Visiting the Greek Orthodox Church of St. George in the small town of Madaba in Jordan, the contemporary viewer witnesses a striking melding of late antique and modern works of art. Many late nineteenth- and twentieth-century wall paintings and icons of Christ, Mary, George, and other saints bedeck the walls, each labeled with his or her proper name in Greek, and occasionally in Arabic as well, enabling the congregants, whose families had apparently emigrated in the 1880s from the town of Karak in the north, and for whom Arabic is their first language, to read the names of the holy figures **(Color Plate 27)**.[1] Upon approaching the central domed crossing, a roped-off area of the floor becomes visible, a stretch of mosaic approximately 35 feet wide and 16 feet long that features images of buildings in miniature, surrounded by rivers, mountains, and, though they were scrambled at some point in the eighth or early ninth centuries, people sailing boats upon the Dead Sea.[2] Oriented to the east, the map spreads out before the viewer. The surviving portions of the mosaic depict a swath of modern Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt, running from a village named "Koreous" in the north (the left side of the mosaic) to the Nile Delta in the south (the right side), with Jerusalem (labeled as the "Holy City Jerusalem") roughly in the center of the extant portion of the floor. First uncovered in the late nineteenth century, the significance of the mosaics, which are probably to be dated to the second half of the sixth century, began to become clear only around the year 1897, when the mosaics were published for the first time.[3]

While the Madaba mosaics appeared to be unique at the time of their discovery, archaeologists have since excavated several pavements that testify to the continuation of this tradition of architectural images. At the nearby site of Umm al-Rasas (the Roman Kastron Mefaa), the floor mosaics of a church dedicated to St. Stephen include a large topographical border with cities and towns labeled clearly and succinctly: on the left side of the pavement, below Jerusalem (as in the Madaba mosaics, called the "Holy City," ΗΑΓΙΑ ΠΟΛΙΣ) lie the cities of Nablus (the "new city," Neapolis, ΝΕΑΠΟΛΙΣ), Sebastia (ΣΕΒΑΣΤΙΣ), and the coastal city of Caesaria (ΚΕΣΑΡΙΑ); while on the right, below the "hometown" of Kastron Mefaa, are Amman (Roman Philadelphia, ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΙΑ) and Madaba itself (ΜΙΔΑΒΑ) (Figure 5.1).[4] Unlike many of the inscriptions that we have examined

Figure 5.1 Image of the city Madaba (MIΔABA), nave pavement of the Church of St. Stephen, Umm al-Rasas, eighth century

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

in the previous chapters, these words are concise, identifying the cities with which they are paired, which are not always easily identifiable by image alone, because most of the cities are depicted in a schematic manner with no local monuments included.[5]

On the map in Madaba, words also hover over and around cities, villages, regions (e.g. Judea, ΙΟΥΔΑ) and natural features such as mountains and rivers, identifying over 157 places on the extant parts of the map. However, even at first glance, one can tell that these inscriptions serve an additional purpose, as many of them are quite wordy, in some cases threatening to overtake the collections of buildings that make up smaller cities and towns. While some are derived from biblical sources, others bear a close relationship to the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius, a fourth-century church historian most famous for his *Ecclesiastical History* and account of the life of the emperor Constantine, which examined the names of places mentioned in the Old and New Testaments.[6] Additionally, the words of the Madaba mosaic not only "speak" the names of cities, towns, and other locations, they also situate these places in time. Some give the names of milestones on contemporary (sixth-century) roads,[7] while others give both old and new names for cities: for example, at the place where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea, one of several potential locations of the baptism of John the Baptist is given as "Ainon, where now is Sapsaphas" (Αἰνῶν ἔνθα νῦν ὁ Σαπσαφας).[8] Most strikingly, some of the inscriptions contextualize locations in terms of biblical time. One of the longest texts of the map, on the right-hand side of the surviving portion of the mosaic, depicting the cities of the Negev Desert, relates the name of the city of Beersheba (modern Be᾽er Sheva): "Beersheba, now Berossaba, as far as there is the border of Judaea to the south [seen] from Dan, near Paneas which borders to the north" **(Color Plate 28)**.[9] These latter words especially give the text a biblical flavor, as the phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" was used to describe the limits of the biblical Holy Land,[10] allowing viewers of the mosaic to connect their own cities to the events of the Bible, compressing secular and sacred time in the interior.

In their range of sizes and colors, the texts present a visual riot for the eye. Upon closer inspection, these visual features serve to organize the ways in which viewers "read" the map: the names of the geographical spaces allotted to the biblical tribes of the Holy Land (e.g. below the land of Judah, or the "lot of Simeon") are written in red and in larger letterforms than the names of cities, and are stretched out so as to give increased space between letters. The names of natural features, including the branches of the Nile River, including the Pelusiac arm (ΠΗΛΟΥΣ, meaning "silty"), are written in larger letterforms as well, though in different colors, including black and white tesserae.[11] But color and size are also used to link together the most important texts in the mosaic, and to make them pop. As the viewer works his or her way across the map, the texts written in red tesserae blaze forth from the floor: not only are the larger names of the regions written in red, but so are the most significant texts across the length of the map. Near the center of the surviving portion, the name of Jerusalem is also inscribed in red ("the holy city Jerusalem") above a representation of an extremely large city, as is the (smaller) name of the town of Bethlehem, slightly to the right.

Other locations significant in the Bible are also written in red: the Oak of Mamre, outside of modern-day Hebron in Palestine, where the angels appeared to Abraham (ἡ δρῦς Μαμβρη);[12] and near Mount Sinai, the Desert of Sin, described as "where the manna and quails were sent down" (ὅπου κατεπέμπφθη τὸ μάννα κ(αὶ) ἡ ὀρτυγομήτρα) during the journey of the Israelites out of Egypt.[13] Two other long red texts quote biblical passages directly, the longest a prayer to the left of the city of Jerusalem: "Joseph, God blessed you with the blessing of the earth that possesses everything, and again, blessed of the Lord be his land" **(Color Plate 29)**.[14] Not only does this fiery text collapse biblical time and the present, it is also a benediction, re-performed in the voice of the reader as (s)he vocalizes the text from the Old Testament.

While the mosaic reflects the world in which it was produced, as Glen Bowersock has argued,[15] the names, phrases, and biblical quotations in fact do much more than describe the sixth-century geography of the town of Madaba and its surrounds. The inscriptions work in tandem with the images that they flank, identifying otherwise schematic representations of towns and cities and, even more importantly, constructing a complicated lens that frames the mosaic in terms of biblical narrative. These modes of framing would have been well known to those who had traveled the popular pilgrimage routes in the region, where they would frequently have recited, or listened to others recite, texts related to the most important biblical sites, and perhaps have collected (and labeled) bits of stone or wood to preserve their connection to the sites.[16] At Madaba, the mosaicists combined text and image in order to collapse time and space, bringing the topography of the wider Holy Land into view for the clergy and the congregation in order to transform their experience inside the church, deeply rooting their regular worship in the world of the Old and New Testaments.[17]

Turning our focus to some of the images that decorate the floors and walls of sacred buildings, primarily Christian ones, this chapter engages with inscriptions that purport to label images in sacred buildings, or that appear within images.[18] These texts are close relatives of the inscriptions that we looked at in the previous chapter, and they have many of the same ekphrastic components. But this chapter focuses more closely on a group of inscriptions that are tied tightly to their images, in some cases (as at Madaba) appearing within the images themselves. Art historians and epigraphers have often argued that texts inside and around images worked in a straightforward manner, fixing for the viewer/reader the identities of sacred figures, donors, and places. However, as we have seen in the case of the Madaba mosaic, these words not only set out familiar names for important places in the region, but they frequently included references to biblical passages that encouraged viewers to interpret images in particular ways. In this sense, the texts considered here are different in character than names of people or places alone, which, though they had their own visual and verbal powers within late antique art, are different as they possess an iconic significance rather than the flexible narrative potential of longer texts.[19] Even the visually powerful abbreviated "sacred names" (*nomina sacra*), especially of that of Christ, which served to identify sacred figures, were received and interpreted in a more or less consistent

manner as repeated and repeatable symbols, and did not open up the same range of responses as did slightly lengthier texts.[20]

This chapter opens with an examination of the role of the late antique *titulus* (literally, "title" or, more generically, "inscription"), typically written in verse and placed next to images meant to tell stories – that is, narrative images. These texts were related to earlier Greek and Roman inscriptions paired with narrative scenes, but privilege different kinds of information and modes of interaction. Through their focus on action and on the act of reading itself, these inscriptions, which often survive independently from the images with which they were most likely meant to be paired, vivified otherwise static images, emphasizing particular parts of sacred stories. Considering *tituli* that survive in buildings and in the textual tradition, as well as *tituli* from both the western and eastern Mediterranean, this chapter develops a broad picture of the range of "title" texts placed in the sacred interior. Next, the chapter turns to texts that appear within images themselves, focusing on inscriptions placed on images of traditional text-bearing media, the scroll (roll) and the book (codex). While they appear on (images of) vellum supports, a place where a literate viewer might expect to find texts, the inscriptions in this group in fact play with different types of voice – of the implied speaker of the text, and of the viewer/reader – to make sometimes complex theological arguments about saints and Christ himself, guiding viewers' interpretations of images and encouraging them to place themselves in the shoes of different holy characters as they moved their eyes across images. Reading did not act as a substitute for looking – rather, the written texts functioned in combination with another version of the texts, the images themselves, nuancing visual representations and emphasizing the active and living presences of the sacred figures depicted. Especially when integrating texts into their images, late antique artists used the visual powers of words to their utmost effect, playing with their placement and arrangement to convey meaningful messages.

The origins and functions of Christian "titles"

The idea that texts could be read alongside images, especially images related to narratives that were transmitted orally or through writing, was not new in late antiquity. On some Greek and Roman works of art, short written phrases or sentences identified particular scenes: a famous example of this latter type are the Tabulae Iliacae, a series of miniature marble tablets whose fronts bear scenes from Greek myth and history, including the Trojan War.[21] As viewers, perhaps at a Roman dinner party or in a library, worked their way through the images on the tablets, they also encountered inscriptions to read alongside the narrative scenes, some paraphrasing lines from related source texts such as Homer's *Iliad*, others setting up playful comparisons between the artist, a man named Theodorus, and Homer himself.[22] Rather than supplanting the images that they border, the texts are instead "concerned with playing upon (and breaking down) boundaries between visual and verbal representation," encouraging readers to explore the different potential relationships that texts could have with images, and that images could have with texts.[23]

While the Tabulae Iliacae are perhaps an exceptional case, on occasion texts were also inscribed in association with images in buildings. In the dining room (*triclinium*) of the fourth-century villa at Lullingstone in Kent, a mosaic pairs an image of Europa and Jupiter, the latter in the form of a white bull, with a verse paraphrase of the relevant episode (Virgil's *Aeneid* 1.50–80), in which Juno asks Aeolus, god of the winds, to send a storm against the hero Aeneas (Figure 5.2): "If jealous Juno had seen the swimming of the bull, she would have gone more justly to the halls of Aeolus."[24] At Lullingstone, the mosaic program connects an image of the seduction of Europa with the inscription of the goddess Juno's hatred of Aeneas, partially due to his descent (as a Trojan) from an offspring of another of Jupiter's affairs, creating a complicated back-and-forth between image and text: the image anticipates the text, and yet the event it portrays (Europa) is, in the original text of the *Aeneid*, not connected to Juno's anger at Aeneas.[25] By setting up a conditional relationship between image and Virgilian text, the inscription prods viewers to think of different possible connections between the image of Europa and other episodes in classical literature, expanding rather than limiting the meaning of the image. Although the inscription's vision of Juno is derived from Virgil, its meter and reference to the "swimming of [Jupiter] the bull" is derived from the

Figure 5.2 Mosaic of Europa and the Bull, *triclinium* of the villa at Lullingstone, England, mid-fourth century

Source: HIP/Art Resource, NY

work of one of Virgil's contemporaries, Ovid, an interesting mash-up of sources which must have kept guests entertained during dinner (*cena*) as they worked to present different interpretations of the image-text game.[26] In its architectural context, the jealousy of Juno perhaps took on yet another meaning, that of the "envy" (*invidia*, or its Greek equivalent, φθόνος), which inscriptions frequently try to avert: as a late fifth-century inscription in a small bathhouse in the city of Anemurium (modern Anamur) in Turkey states, "May Envy keep away from the excellence of the mosaic."[27]

The dates of the Lullingstone and Anemurium examples accord with a shift that seems to begin in the fourth century, when it became increasingly common practice to place inscribed texts next to or near images inside secular and, as we will see shortly, sacred buildings, creating a kind of textuality specific to the late antique interior. Even works of art created in previous centuries were not immune from this practice: the elaborate Roman sculptural program in the grotto at Sperlonga in Italy, featuring images of Odysseus blinding Polyphemus and other scenes from Greek and Roman narratives of the Trojan War, was modified with the addition of an epigram in the fourth century that emphasized the Virgilian elements of the program.[28] Similarly, the late Hellenistic reliefs from the temple of the Pergamene queen Apollonis at Cyzicus in Anatolia (in modern Turkey) were the subject of new poems in the sixth century CE that may (or may not) have been written onto tablets within the building itself.[29] These texts, as well as the lengthier inscriptions that begin to appear in late antique mosaics in the houses of the wealthy, may have served to emphasize the education (*paideia*) of their patrons while also opening both image and text to a wider range of interpretations.[30] Inscriptions began to balloon to such lengths that authors of the period poke fun at them, including the fifth-century poet Sidonius Apollinaris, who contrasts a short poem inscribed onto the walls of his private bathhouse at Clermont-Ferrand in Roman Gaul with the longer poems written on his neighbors' walls and floors: "only a few lines of verse will cause the new-comer to stop and read: these strike the happy mean, for although they inspire no longing to read them again, they can be read through without boredom."[31]

Inside churches, inscriptions, especially in mosaic, began to proliferate as they never had in temples.[32] Unlike inscriptions present in temple interiors, which were almost always dedicatory in character, inside churches, texts paired with images could also quote, adapt, or paraphrase passages from the Old and New Testaments, emphasizing different aspects of Jewish and Christian sacred narratives. In this chapter, we will consider the texts that appear in association with images and that appear to comment on them before moving on to texts that engage more generally with architectural spaces in the next chapter. As might be expected, these texts are much more Jewish or Christian than "classical" in their explicit affiliations – that is, they draw on language from the Bible and from early exegeses of important biblical episodes. Although this language was of course shaped by earlier classical traditions, the texts are primarily concerned with vividness (*enargeia*), a main component of ekphrasis, and with staging particular (imagined) responses to a range of iconographies.

Texts paired with images are often referred to as *tituli*, literally "titles" or, more generically, "inscriptions," a term that requires further discussion.[33] The term is an ancient one, often used by Roman poets to refer to the "title" of a literary work: as Ovid begins his work *Tristia* so mournfully, "Little book, you will go without me – and I do not grudge it – to the city. . . . Go, but go unadorned, as becomes the book of an exile . . . your title shall not be tinged with vermilion (*nec titulus minio*), nor your paper with oil of cedar."[34] Ovid's "book" may not have had an elaborately colored title, but this passage suggests that many books of the period did – the red pigment drawing the reader's attention to the title written onto a label tied to the scroll. The types of "titles" under consideration here are different in character from Ovid's *titulus*, but, as we will see, they share a similar emphasis on visual impact.

However, the relationship of our painted and mosaic texts to the images or spaces that they are placed above, below, or next to is more complicated than the link between Ovid's book and its title. It is somewhat misleading to emphasize the meaning of *titulus* as "title" or "caption," because the inscriptions with which we are engaged serve various functions. As we have seen already on the Madaba Map, these texts did not just reduce the multiple meanings and significances of an image to a single word or phrase. In our case, the more general meaning of *titulus* as "inscription" may have been a better fit for the original understanding of the function of these texts. As Isidore of Seville wrote in the early seventh century in his *Etymologies* (*Etymologia*), "An epigram [*epigramma*] is an inscription [*titulus*], which is translated into Latin as 'a writing upon something' [*superscriptio*], for ἐπί is translated as 'upon' [*super*] and γράμμα as 'letter' or 'writing' [*scriptio*]."[35] While this nonspecific definition may seem to hinder rather than help our understanding of texts in sacred interiors, Isidore's placement of the description of epigram, and thus *titulus*, within his discussion of different genres of poetry ("On Meter," *De metris*) in fact tells us a great deal about the late antique perception of these kinds of texts.[36] Indeed, many of the *tituli* that survive were in fact written in verse.[37] In his recent work on Latin *tituli*, Francesco Lubian sets out some of the more typical characteristics shared by these texts: they were short poems, typically from two to four lines long; they tend to use the present tense, emphasize the act of viewing through deictics (e.g. "here," *hic*), and verbs related to sight ("look!" *ecce*); and they often work to dramatize images, perform miniature ekphraseis of actions or characters in the image, or draw out particular aspects of the narrative being depicted, or of the character of the space.[38]

Tituli on and off the page

Most extant cycles of *tituli* survive only in textual form, transmitted through manuscripts of medieval or later date. This has created a problem for specialists, who have debated whether or not these poems were ever paired with images inside churches. Cycles of narrative images, especially of biblical scenes, certainly did not require inscriptions. In fact, *tituli* are absent from the major mosaic and fresco narrative cycles of Old and New Testament scenes known from the walls of the

Figure 5.3 View down the nave with wall mosaics (above the entablature), Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, fifth century

Source: Photograph by author

fifth-century churches of Santa Maria Maggiore (Figure 5.3)[39] and San Paolo fuori le mura in Rome,[40] as well as the sixth-century cycle of New Testament scenes in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna.[41] Instead of pointing out their lack of "explanatory" texts, authors of the period refer to these programs and similar ones as "Bibles for the illiterate," suggesting that the images themselves were sufficient and intended for less erudite audiences. In the fifth century, the monk Nilus of Ancyra instructed the prefect Olympiodorus that Old and New Testament scenes were proper for church interiors so that

> the illiterate who are unable to read the holy scriptures, may, by gazing at the pictures, become mindful of the manly deeds of those who have genuinely served the true God, and may be roused to emulate those glorious and celebrated feats.[42]

The idea that pictures acted in place of text for illiterate congregants as a "Pauper's Bible" (the *biblia pauperum*) was a popular one in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages,[43] employed by Gregory of Nyssa,[44] Basil of Caesarea,[45] and Paulinus of Nola;[46] famously echoed by Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century;[47] and repeated yet again by John of Damascus in the eighth century in his commentary on one of Basil's sermons.[48] If we take this representation at face value, cycles of narrative images were meant as substitutes for biblical texts. However, images were never *just* "Bibles for the illiterate," as Paulinus's own writings make clear: though he defends the didactic force of pictures, he commissioned and composed elaborate poems that emphasize the deeply spiritual significances of images and spaces in his churches, to which we will return shortly.[49]

Christian verse *tituli* began to gain in popularity in the late fourth and early fifth centuries in the western half of the empire, the same period that saw the increasing taste for cycles of Old and New Testament scenes in church interiors. Arwed Arnulf and others have been interested in these texts in terms of their evolution from their (shorter) Greek and Roman ancestors, the literary merits of the texts, as well as in their existence as letters off of the page.[50] This latter debate has inspired many of the words written on the topic in the past several decades, as scholars have attempted to prove or disprove the widespread use of verse inscriptions in combination with images. A case in point is the debate centered on a cycle of forty-eight Latin epigrams written in hexameter by the poet Prudentius in the late fourth century, the *Dittochaeon* ("double nourishment"), a work that survives only in textual transmission, and some of the earliest examples of which, dated to the Carolingian period, named the cycle "*tituli* from historical narratives" (*Tituli historiarum*).[51] The cycle is divided evenly between verses about Old and New Testament stories, many of them related to scenes found in early Christian art, including on the walls of churches in Rome and Ravenna.[52] Not only does the equal division of poems between Old and New Testament subjects emphasize the typological connection between the Testaments, with the events of the New Testament seen as the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Old, but individual poems also seem to push typological readings of Old Testament stories: for example, the poem on the crossing of the dry Jordan River by Joshua and the Israelites (Joshua 3–4) who bore the Ark of the Covenant, which asks the reader to "witness the twelve stones which the fathers set in the river itself, prefiguring the disciples [of Christ]."[53] This particular episode is rarely depicted in late antique art, but when it is, as on the nave walls of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, it appears without this particular detail. The focus is on the Ark itself, carried by the Israelites (Figure 5.4).[54]

However, this lack of a specific correspondence between extant visual examples and Prudentius's poems does not tell us much about whether or not the poems ever were written onto the walls of a church, underneath related images: the scene of the crossing of the Jordan and its pendant scene immediately below, of Joshua dressed as a Roman military leader sending out his followers to spy on the city of Jericho (Joshua 2), are strongly influenced not by a pre-existing Christian or Jewish artistic tradition, but by visual formats borrowed from Roman monumental art, particularly the triumphal columns of Trajan and

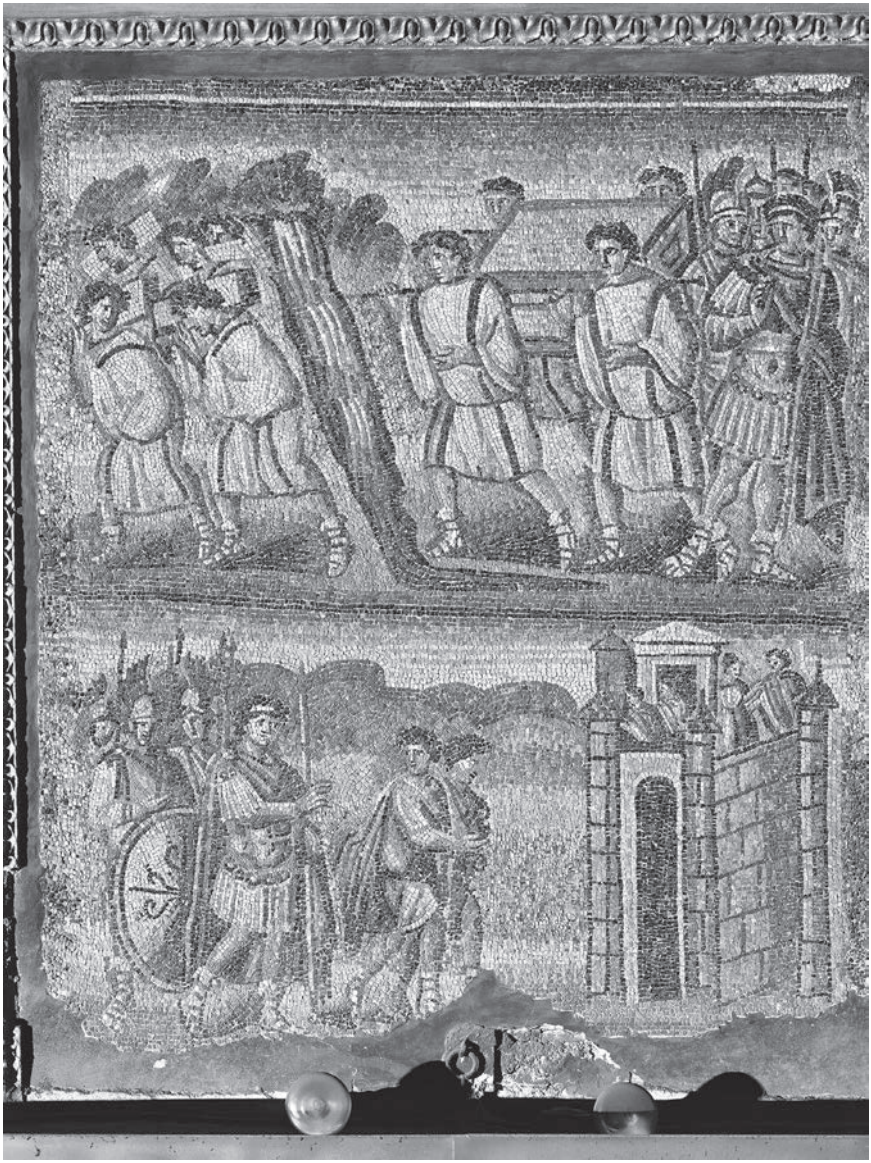

Figure 5.4 The Ark of the Covenant Crossing the Jordan River (top) and the Spies from Jericho (bottom), nave wall mosaic, Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome

Source: Scala/Art Resource, NY

Marcus Aurelius.[55] Others have doubted that forty-eight scenes, each with its own relatively lengthy *titulus*, could in fact fit onto the walls of a church in the late fourth or fifth century, even those of a relatively large basilica such as Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill in Rome.[56]

The possible existence of Prudentius's cycle of poems outside of the pages of a book is in fact not its most interesting aspect for us. More significantly, the poems provide a window into a world of competitive *tituli*, a showcase for the literary ambitions of the most prominent writers of the day, and into the different possible receptions of biblical images on church walls. The textual record preserves a number of sets of *tituli* similar to those written by Prudentius, including cycles written by the famous fourth-century bishop of Milan, Ambrose;[57] the fifth-century poet Rusticius Helpidius;[58] Venantius Fortunatus;[59] and a particularly extravagant series of late fifth-century *tituli* commissioned by poets including Sidonius Apollinaris and Paulinus of Périgaux, which were intended for the walls of the interior of the Basilica of St. Martin at Tours in Gaul (France).[60] In certain, especially erudite, urban locales such as Tours, the walls of churches were large screens on which to create painted or mosaic images of biblical scenes, as well as to write texts that acted as "interpretative voice overs" for these scenes that also testified to the poetic talents and interpretative skills of their composers.[61] These men make clear that their *tituli* were testaments to their erudition: for instance, the epitaph of Ennodius, a fifth-century poet, states that "his walls still repeat his teachings" (*et paries functi dogmata nunc loquitur*).[62] Sidonius Apollinaris, recounting his inscription meant for the walls of the church built by Bishop Patiens at Lyons, assumes an air of false humility in comparing his poems to those of his colleagues:

> For the two sides of the basilica where they adjoin the altar are glorified by the hexameters of the eminent poets Constantius and Secundinus; these verses my modesty absolutely debars from a place in this letter, for a comparison with better poetry is too severe for a shrinking soul who is nervously exhibiting his own casual efforts . . . foisted into a place in their midst when it takes the lowest place in merit, it [Sidonius's poem] earns a double contempt by such a combination of presumption and incompetence. So the inscriptions by the poets I have named are more justly honored than this of mine, which is a mere creation of hollow conceits and what may be called shadowy outlines.[63]

Sidonius's exaggerated humility is a frequent trope in his writings, and his skills as a poet should not be taken lightly: indeed, the poem he recounts is an ekphrastic *tour de force*, providing a tour of the church that compares the interior of the building to a meadow surrounded by a "forest," the numerous columns of the atrium.[64]

These poems were not only instruments of competition between poets. *Tituli* such as those by Prudentius were meant to work in their specific context – paired with images on a wall, or on the page of a book – as well as within the larger visual sphere of the period, focusing attention on particular aspects of a biblical story,

as did other forms of literature, especially exegeses and homilies.[65] The epigrams of Prudentius's *Dittochaeon* do not quote directly from the Bible but instead paraphrase important events, explaining the different components of scenes and labeling different elements with the deictics of a tour guide, as on the image of the Three Magi: "Here [*hic*] the wise men bring costly gifts to the child Christ on the Virgin's breast."[66] Through his use of the rhetorical strategies of ekphrasis, particularly that of *enargeia* ("vividness"), Prudentius vivifies the scenes he describes, turning them into living images.[67]

In terms of contemporary scholarship, the most well-known author of *tituli* is probably Paulinus, Bishop of Nola in Campania, about thirty kilometers from Naples. After he took over the bishopric from Felix, his distinguished predecessor, Paulinus set about renovating the church and composed a number of epigrams which he says were to be placed at particular spaces within the church, including paired with images.[68] The church still exists in the modern town, but no traces of the inscriptions remain on the interior walls, though there are remnants of the epitaph of Felix, written around the aedicule that encompasses his tomb.[69] Paulinus includes the *tituli* of the church within his letters, and these text-only survivors raise some of the same questions as do the epigrams of Prudentius. Because the plan of the late antique church is more or less known, and because the poems themselves are so detailed, historians and art historians have been keen to reinscribe these poems into the space, and to consider what sorts of images they may have been paired with.[70] The context of the poems is more clearly architectural than that of Prudentius's epigrams, so they are treated here as if they were once present in the space. However, as has increasingly been recognized, it is a foolish task to use epigrams, especially ekphrastic ones, to recreate lost image programs. As we have seen already in the previous chapter, the goal of ekphrasis was not to provide an objective description of a space, or of an image, but to create a vivid impression of the space or scene being described.[71] When we instead consider *tituli* on their own merits, they reveal a great deal about their power to complement and, in some cases, to complicate an image.

In his letters, Paulinus states that his *tituli* were placed at significant points of access into and out of the church complex. Because these were not paired with images, we will leave these aside for the moment and pick them up again in the following chapter. The two longest epigrams written by Paulinus were ostensibly meant to be placed in the apse of the New Basilica (Basilica Nova) at Nola, built to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers of pilgrims to Felix's shrine. In his letters, Paulinus gives a motivation for his inclusion of *tituli* in the church's decorative program: "the shadow painted with colors [i.e. the image] is expressed by a *titulus* above, so that the written letters show [or teach] what the hand [of the artist] explicated."[72] While Paulinus is often seen to suggest that the texts are simple explanations of the scenes, the motivation here is in fact an open one, indicating a more flexible understanding of the relationship between words and images than that with which the author is usually credited.[73]

Composed in iambic trimeter, the *tituli* are striking in their employment of the elements of ekphrasis. An epigram apparently placed on the wall of the apse

performed an abbreviated ekphrasis on the altar and on a piece of wood from the True Cross placed inside,[74] while a second epigram was paired with the image in the apse conch of the church:

> In full mystery sparkles the Trinity:
> Christ stands as lamb, the voice of the Father thunders from heaven
> and the Holy Spirit flows down by means of a dove.
> A wreath surrounds the cross in a bright circle,
> around which wreath the apostles form a wreath,
> the image of whom is expressed in a chorus of doves.
> The holy unity of the Trinity meets in Christ,
> Who likewise has His signs in three [the Trinity]:
> the voice of the Father and the Holy Spirit reveal God,
> the cross and the lamb confess Him as the sacred sacrificial victim
> the purple and the palm indicate His kingdom and triumph.
> He himself, the rock of the church, stands on a rock
> from which four resounding springs issue,
> the Evangelists, the living streams of Christ.[75]

In the *titulus* paired with the apse mosaic, the Trinity "sparkles" (*coruscat*) in "full mystery" (*pleno mysterio*), as each member is portrayed in symbolic guise: Christ "stands as lamb" (*stat Christus agno*), while the voice of God the Father "thunders from heaven" (*vox patris caelo tonat*) and the Holy Spirit, represented as a dove, "flows (down)" (*fluit*). After remarking upon the large wreathed cross in the center, the epigram ends with Christ standing as lamb on a rock "from which four resounding springs issue" (*de qua sonori quattuor fontes meant*), the four rivers of Paradise that symbolize "the Evangelists, the living streams of Christ" (*Evangelistae viva Christi flumina*). In the poems, not only do figures and forms move in space; their symbolic valences merge with each other and flow apart again, creating a doubled sense of motion and meaning.[76]

While we have no real idea what the mosaic itself looked like, or if indeed it ever existed, the activity and dynamism of Paulinus's language encourages literate viewers to read the (missing) static image as an animated one. If present roughly as described, the mosaic's elements – Christ represented as a lamb, standing on a rock from which the four rivers of Paradise flow, and the Holy Spirit imagined as a dove – would have been easily recognized and identified by viewers, especially those educated enough to have read the accompanying poem. The text's role, then, was not to identify these common representations of the members of the Trinity, but perhaps to supplement the image with "missing" parts – such as the voice of God the Father, rarely depicted in late antique art – as well as to present a unified (verbal) composition that weaves together the symbols of key members of the Christian heavenly hierarchy. If this ekphrastic response were indeed incorporated into the decorative program of the New Basilica, Paulinus's poems would have encouraged audiences to adopt a synthetic response to the image, which would have been "read" as if it were animated.[77]

Outside the (purely?) textual tradition of Prudentius and Paulinus, the material evidence of *tituli* from churches in the late antique west is slim. Several *tituli* were recorded in collections of inscriptions (*syllogae*) and in sketches made of the churches of Rome in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, including of the apse of Old St. Peter's in Rome before it was demolished in the early sixteenth century and replaced with the church that still stands today.[78] According to drawings made before its demolition, the church, begun by Constantine and completed by his son Constantius II, featured an apse mosaic with Christ giving the law to Peter and Paul (the so-called *traditio legis*).[79] Below this image was placed a four-line inscription in Latin:

> This which you see and which mercy undivided inhabits, is the seat of justice, the house of faith, the hall of chastity, which rejoices in the virtues of the father and son and equals its founder with his sire in praise.[80]

The inscription stresses "the foundation of the Church and the primacy of the Roman See"[81] established by Peter, as does the image above. However, there is not the same level of interplay between inscription and image as possibly existed in Paulinus's church at Nola. Instead, the focus of the text is a generalized ekphrasis of the grand building, encouraging readers who "see" (*cernis*) the building to "rejoice" (*gaudet*), as does the building itself, in its imperial founders.[82]

Other *tituli* preserved in later *syllogae* aim to expand the visible implications of images of saints and of the founders of churches. On the apse wall of the Arian church of Sant'Agata dei Goti in Rome, built c. 460–470 but not extant today, *tituli* were inscribed around two bust-length portraits of Peter, framed by roundels below the main apse mosaic.[83] Based on drawings of the apse made before it collapsed in the late sixteenth century, images of Peter reach up to heaven to take keys from the descending hand of God, and both roundels are surrounded by texts which reference Gospel episodes (Figure 5.5). The left roundel is inscribed, "You left the ship for me, take the key"; and the right, "That which you shall bind I shall bind, that which you loosen I myself shall undo."[84] These two inscriptions combine Christ's actions and His words to Peter in two episodes described in the Gospel of Matthew, in which Peter leaves the boat to try to walk on the water to reach Christ (Matthew 14:29–34);[85] and is named the "Rock of the Church" in reward for recognizing Christ as the Messiah (Matthew 16:13–20). In depicting Peter twice (three times, if his appearance with the other apostles in the apse mosaic is included) and drawing attention to his acts during Christ's life as well as the basis for his episcopal authority, the program uses text and image to reinforce the apostle's status in the church hierarchy.[86] The local importance of Peter in Rome would not have been lost on the patron of the church, Ricimer, a powerful *magister militum* of the western empire and a Goth, who molded the decoration of his church to assert visually his political and religious control of the city.[87]

If we turn to *tituli* that are still visible on the walls of churches in Rome, it becomes apparent that these texts were aimed at focusing and particularizing interpretations of the mosaic images with which they were paired. In the

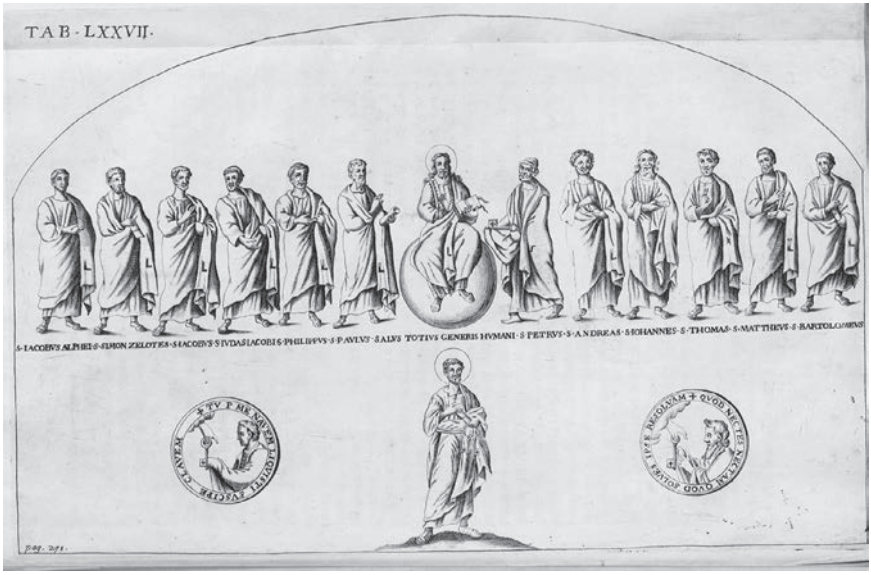

Figure 5.5 Drawing of the apse mosaic, Sant'Agata dei Goti, Rome, c. 460–470
Source: After Ciampini 1690, Tab. LXXVII

sixth-century apse of Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome, the glass and gold-glass tesserae of the mosaic "shine" (*radiat*), while the presence of the doctor-martyrs, who are introduced to Christ by Peter and Paul, guarantees "sure hope of health" (*spes certa salutis*) (Figure 5.6). Pope Felix IV, present to Christ's right, presents a model of his church, an act emphasized by the inscription, which describes Felix's "gift to the Lord, a gift worthy of a bishop" (*hoc Domino . . . antiste dignum munus*), made so that Felix may earn entry into heaven.[88] The seventh-century apse inscription at Sant'Agnese fuori le mura focuses attention on the "golden picture" (*aurea . . . pictura*) that "rises up" (*surgit*) from the mosaics above, using active language to evoke the sense that the images are animated (Figure 5.7). While the apse mosaic centers on the titular martyr Agnes, who stands on a fiery platform, the verse text encourages viewers to focus instead on the donor, Pope Honorius, depicted to Agnes's right in the act of presenting a model of his church (like Felix in the previous example):

> What is seen by one upward look
> are these votive offerings Honorius has given.
> He has been marked by his robes and deeds.
> He shines, bearing light in his heart.[89]

Using the language of light to describe the noble character of Honorius, who has the look of "shining hearts" (*aspectu lucida corda*), the poet channels the spirit

Figure 5.6 Apse mosaic with inscription, Santi Cosma e Damiano, Rome, 526–530
Source: Scala/Art Resource, NY

Figure 5.7 Apse mosaic with inscription, Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, Rome, 625–638
Source: Photograph by author

of late antique poets such as Venantius Fortunatus, who employed an almost identical turn of phrase to praise his friend Flavius: "you have lights of the heart [*lumina cordis habes*], the lamp of your soul radiating light, and your head flashes with eternal light."[90] Santo Stefano Rotondo, a church in Rome that also featured mosaics put up by Felix IV, still contains a seventh-century mosaic of the saints Primus and Felicianus flanking a large jeweled cross. Immediately below the image, the inscription seems to reference the golden ground of the mosaic and the "starry face" of Christ, placed in a roundel atop the cross and below the starry vault of heaven.[91]

Each of these *tituli* from the churches of Rome performs a slightly different task in its own context. However, all rely on the language of ekphrasis to encourage viewers to perceive images in motion that continuously reenact narratives from the Bible or from the life of the church building itself. Interestingly, the few examples of *tituli* that are still *in situ* in Rome do not resemble those of Prudentius – they do not emphasize typological connections between the Old and New Testaments, for example – which could suggest that the latter were part of a textual tradition that did not migrate into the church interior, or that images in different areas of the church (walls, apse) merited very different types of texts.

Tituli in the east

Although individual as well as cycles of *tituli* appear to have been more common in the late antique west, some buildings in the eastern Mediterranean also featured *tituli*. However, because of the lack of a substantial tradition of anthologizing Greek inscriptions (outside of the different compilations that make up the modern *Greek Anthology*), and because of the poor state of preservation of the walls of most late antique buildings in the eastern half of the empire, it is difficult to get a full picture of the texts, or the images, which appeared on their walls. Several *tituli* survive from the third-century wall paintings of the synagogue (in Aramaic) and the Christian baptistery at Dura Europos in Syria. These are short texts placed within the images that provide versions of the related biblical passages: for example, on the painting of Moses parting the Red Sea, an inscription between the legs of the first (right-hand) of two figures of Moses states, "Moses, when he went forth from Egypt and parted the sea."[92] At Dura, these texts are more or less straightforward in their intent, apparently meant to clarify the actions of the figures depicted.

The *Greek Anthology* also preserves a group of Christian poems that at least pretend to have had an architectural context.[93] These were collected by Agathias in his *Cycle* of poems in the later sixth century, though none have been definitively linked to the known poets of the period.[94] While these texts were not ever placed together in the same building, and may have been transmitted purely as literary works, they serve to demonstrate that poems similar to those of Prudentius and Paulinus were composed in the Greek east. The poems perform ekphraseis of episodes from the Old and New Testaments as well as of events from the lives of saints, and generally feature a voice (of the poet or the viewer) describing or reacting to scenes, occasionally addressing figures directly. As transmitted in the

Anthology, the Old and New Testament poems are jumbled together. The majority of the poems emphasize the motion of figures in the scenes, adding drama to the narrative.[95] Their forms are diverse, including several that present brief dialogues, such as the one on the priest-king Melchisedek, who gave Abraham bread and wine (Genesis 14): "Melchisedek, king and priest, who are you that gives bread and wine?" "A figure [or type, τύπος] of Truth."[96] Rather than simply describing the actions of the priest-king, the poet constructs a dialogue that can be acted out by one or more readers, allowing them to ask the protagonist of the scene a question and then stage the king's response. Like that on Melchisedek, the poems describing Old Testament events relentlessly adopt a typological focus as they describe persons and events that are "types" of Christ: for example, on a scene of Abraham and Isaac: "Abraham takes his son to be sacrificed to God. Have mercy! This picture is a type of the sacrifice the mind sees."[97] Readers were asked to remember the connection between Isaac's near-sacrifice and Christ's sacrifice on behalf of mankind, knitting together Old and New Testament episodes into a single coherent whole.

The New Testament poems include invocations to characters in the narrative as well as prayers in the first person, allowing readers to engage more deeply with the scenes. The poem on the Annunciation presents a version of (though not a direct quote from) the Greek of the New Testament event: "Greetings, graceful maiden, most blessed immaculate bride. You will hold in your womb the son of God, a baby conceived without a father."[98] In the context of the scene, this text acts as the words spoken by the archangel Gabriel that announce the Virgin's pregnancy; as performed, they are simultaneously a greeting spoken by the reader to Mary. The poem on the Crucifixion is a generalized prayer that can be made specific by the reader: "O suffering, O cross, O blood that drives out suffering, cleanse my soul from all wickedness."[99] By presenting a personalizable poem on a crucial scene, albeit one rarely depicted in visual art before the Middle Byzantine period, the poet encourages the reader to engage intimately with the story, using the cross as a focus and a channel for prayer.[100]

Whether or not they were originally paired with a series of images in a single building, many of the poems certainly present themselves as if they were meant to go with images. Interestingly, one poem in the group associates itself with a building in Ephesus, on the western coast of Turkey, which some have suggested was the Church of St. John the Theologian, a large basilica built with the sponsorship of the emperor Justinian.[101] In the church as it survives, fragmentary Greek inscriptions are paired with the scenes painted on the walls of the narthex and nave, though these texts are much simpler than those from the *Greek Anthology*, presenting versions of the biblical text related to the image.[102]

A more extensive series of images and texts survive from the walls of the atrium of the fifth-century Basilica A, also called the Basilica of Damokratia after its female patron, at Demetrias in Greece, where fragments of an extensive painted Old and New Testament program appear on the walls (Figure 5.8). Three texts are preserved in the atrium, each paired with a very fragmentary image. On the west wall, Old and New Testament texts are combined, including two episodes

Figure 5.8 Drawing of the wall paintings from the atrium, Basilica A (Basilica of Damokratia), Demetrias, Greece, fifth century

Source: Drawing by Yvonne Beadnell

from the Book of Joshua, the circumcision of the next generation of Israelites at Gilgal/Galgala (Joshua 5:7–9) and the construction of an altar on Mount Ebal, near Nablus (Joshua 8:30–5). Near the door into the atrium from the entrance hall, one episode from the New Testament appears, the preparation for Christ's entry into Jerusalem, set at Bethphage, just to the east of the Mount of Olives (Matthew 21:1–10; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:29–41).[103] On the north wall, set in Bethlehem, appears Jacob's Dream, in which he sees a ladder connecting earth and heaven (Genesis 28:12).[104] Unlike the fragmentary program at Ephesus or the poems from the *Greek Anthology*, the wall paintings at Demetrias are organized by geography, so that each inscription begins with the site associated with the relevant event: "the city of Bethlehem" ([πόλι]ς Βηθλεέμ), where Jacob had his dream of the divine ladder; "the place of Galgala (Gilgal)" ([τόπος Γαλ]γαλα), where Joshua was instructed to circumcise the Israelites; or "the place of Bethphage" (τόπος Βηθφαγή), where Christ prepared his entry into Jerusalem. While the texts are significantly longer than those of the Madaba Map, they serve a similar purpose, projecting a sacred geography onto the walls of the church, allowing viewers to associate biblical events with sites in the Holy Land. The images that appear with the texts are almost entirely architectural, depicting buildings schematically, as at Madaba and Umm al-Rasas, apparently without any figures populating them. The

image of Jacob's Ladder, for example, is composed of a ladder that appears next to a building with two towers – an abstract representation of Bethlehem that bears no specific resemblance to the city as it appeared in the period.

Based upon the other fragments of surviving paintings, the program was much more extensive in its original form, though it is impossible to reconstruct the missing episodes with any certainty. However, like the *Greek Anthology* poems, as well as the *tituli*-less scenes in Santa Maria Maggiore, the combination of Old and New Testament episodes at Demetrias strongly suggests the use of typology as an organizing concept, employed to show the Holy Land as the place from which both Judaism and Christianity sprung. In these two churches at Ephesus and Demetrias, texts acted visually to frame and separate, breaking up otherwise continuous scenes into images to be viewed and interpreted separately. While the images are very fragmentary in both churches, it appears that they served different purposes: at Ephesus, the texts present simple verbal paraphrases of the event shown in the image; while at Demetrias, the texts particularize the generic images of walled cities with which they are paired.

From wall to floor: reading texts underfoot

Up to this point, we have been focused on texts that were placed on walls, clarifying or complicating the images next to which they appear. While these images perhaps functioned as "picture books for the illiterate," the texts themselves suggest that these image-text pairings served to convey complex messages to more erudite audiences, including educated patrons and members of the clergy. These image-text programs typically occurred in sets, either in the church or as series of poems transmitted via the manuscript tradition. Strikingly, the same kinds of images and texts did not appear on the floors of sacred buildings in the period. Instead of images drawn from the Old and New Testaments, floors with figural decoration more frequently featured scenes of rural life – men and women farming, hunting, fishing, making wine – or of animal scenes or landscapes.[105] Although some of these programs, including that from the Basilica of St. Demetrios at Nikopolis (discussed in Chapter 4) did feature texts that were related to the images they abut – at Nikopolis, for example, the text emphasizes the cosmic imagery of the floor, encouraging motion and interpretation – the vast majority were paired instead with donor inscriptions.

A small group of churches and synagogues both east and west did feature programs related more specifically to sacred history. These particular mosaics all quote or present variants of passages from the Old Testament in combination with images, and depict one of four subjects generally: episodes from the Book of Genesis, including Adam and Eve and Abraham and Isaac; scenes from the life of Samson; the "peaceful kingdom" (Isaiah 11:6); and Psalm 50 (51), a popular penitential psalm that encouraged Christian audiences to reflect upon modes of worship, including sacrifice. Although the episodes depicted on floors all come from the Old Testament, the relationship between text and image, and the significance of the overall program in context, is different for each subject, suggesting that

while artists worked from some kind of model for each type of scene, the approach to combining biblical text and image on the floor of a church or synagogue was relatively flexible. These texts embedded into the floor typically have not been considered by those working on the more high-minded, verse *tituli*.[106] While these texts may not be "titles" in the same way as the poems considered thus far, since they tend towards quotation rather than invention, adaptation, or combination, they raise the same sorts of text-image questions as the verse *tituli* of Paulinus or those from the *Greek Anthology*, and may in fact have been more accessible to a wider range of readers.

While images derived from the Book of Genesis are not uncommon in late antique churches and synagogues, very few of these are combined with related texts. Two examples from Syria and Palestine present the only extant examples of scenes from Genesis that feature texts as companions. A late fifth- or early sixth-century mosaic of Adam and Eve, now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, depicts the two covering themselves with leaves after having eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which appears to the right (Figure 5.9).[107] Above the two figures runs a paraphrase of Genesis 3:6–7: "And they ate, [and] were made naked." Because the mosaic panel was acquired on the art market in 1969, the exact context of this particular panel within its original pavement is unknown, but it is presumed to come from a church in northern Syria, perhaps from the region around Maʿarat al-Nuʿman.[108] While other mosaics of Adam, such as that of the late fifth-century mosaic of Adam naming the animals from the North Church at Huarte, also in Syria, appear to have been placed in the east end of the church's nave pavement, the panel of Adam and Eve is difficult to situate in the absence of knowledge about the other mosaics of the building, though a fragmentary border of red and black tesserae is visible at the edge of the scene, above the inscription.[109] While it may seem strange to us today, the semi-nudity of the two figures, especially of Eve, is required by the biblical story.[110] Topless versions of Eve are common in art of the period, including in the image of Adam and Eve from the third-century Christian baptistery at Dura Europos,[111] on late Roman sarcophagi,[112] and in catacomb paintings in Rome.[113] In the Syrian example, the relationship between image and text is one of narrative in motion: Adam and Eve's actions in the inscription – they ate from the tree, and discovered that they were naked – precede the moment depicted in the image when they covered themselves. The relationship between text and image is symbiotic: the text articulates the set-up for the image, and the image completes the text. The context and full extent of the mosaic program is unclear; its primary function appears to have been simultaneously didactic and symbolic, as the episode of "original sin" set the stage for the coming of Christ and His redemption of mankind.[114]

In several synagogues, inscriptions accompany biblical scenes drawn from Genesis, including in the sixth-century synagogue at Sepphoris in Israel, where short biblical quotations appear above the image of the visit of the consecration of Aaron to the Jerusalem Temple (Figure 5.10).[115] These short inscriptions have been interpreted as texts meant to "explain" the images with which they appear, which reduces their power while simultaneously denigrating the images as

Figure 5.9 Fragment of a floor mosaic with Adam and Eve, Northern Syria, late fifth–early sixth century, marble and stone tesserae; overall: 142.9 × 107.3 × 5.6 cm (56 ¼ × 42 $^{3}/_{16}$ × 2 ¼ in.); mounted: 142.9 × 107.3 × 7 cm (56 ¼ × 42 $^{3}/_{16}$ × 2 ¾ in.)

Source: The Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund 1969.115

Figure 5.10 Detail of the consecration of Aaron to the Temple, floor mosaic of the synagogue at Sepphoris, Israel, early fifth century

Source: Photograph by author

requiring explanations.[116] However, in the sixth-century synagogue at Beth Alpha, not far from Beth Shean, several short passages in Hebrew challenge the assumption of a simple agreement between text and image.[117] In the mosaic of Abraham and Isaac that appears near the entrance to the synagogue, immediately before the famous zodiac panel in the center of the hall, the two figures are named with labels that appear above their heads (Figure 5.11). More interesting, though, are the two slightly longer inscriptions in the scene. Paired with the hand of God, directly below, a text proclaims, "Do not raise your hand" (Genesis 22:12), allowing God to "speak" to Abraham before he plunges the knife into his son. Next to the ram to be sacrificed in place of Isaac, which is tied to the plant next to Abraham, a second inscription reads, "He saw a ram" (Genesis 13). The words not only explain, but function to highlight the crucial moments in the narrative, allowing the reader to establish the part of the episode that is depicted.[118] The use of inscribed text for divine speech is logical, as the words of God could not be represented iconographically, although they could be introduced to the scene by the viewer's imagination, as described by Gregory of Nyssa in his ekphrasis on the dramatic climax of the scene: "Already the edge of the sword touches the body [of Isaac], when a voice sounds unto him [Abraham] from God prohibiting the deed."[119] The dramatic placement of the inscribed speech of God invites anyone gazing upon the mosaic to read the text aloud, allowing him or her to perform a role in the retelling of a

Figure 5.11 Abraham and Isaac, floor mosaic of the synagogue at Beth Alpha, Israel, sixth century

Source: Photograph by author

story that defines the relationship between Abraham (and thus the Jewish people) and God, inhabiting the tension-filled moment as a witness to the event.

Another biblical episode that appears in combined text-image form on the floor of a sacred building is the story of Samson, the Israelite hero famed for his physical strength. Previously, this story was thought to appear rarely in synagogues or churches. However, in recent years, two synagogues featuring images of Samson have been excavated in Israel, at Wadi Hamam and Huqoq. The mosaics of the fifth-century Huqoq synagogue are not yet fully published, but they appear to show a particular moment in the Samson narrative where the hero ties torches to the tails of foxes and lets them loose on the crops of the Philistines.[120] Another figure that has been identified as Samson appears in the cycle of biblical mosaics that decorate the floor of the Wadi Hamam synagogue, where he is shown as a giant gripping three Philistine soldiers by the hair, about to smite them with the jawbone of a donkey (Judges 15:15–17).[121] Neither of these images from the story of Samson includes inscriptions that relate directly to their content.

However, a third floor mosaic excavated at the site of Mopsuestia in Cilicia (modern Misis in Turkey) features both images and extensive biblical quotations that portray a cycle of at least nine scenes from the Book of Judges (Figure 5.12).[122] Unfortunately, our understanding of the mosaics is affected by the ongoing debate over the date[123] and function of the building, which seems more likely to have been a church than a synagogue.[124] The original number of scenes is also unclear due to the extent of damage to the mosaics, though the scenes originally stretched

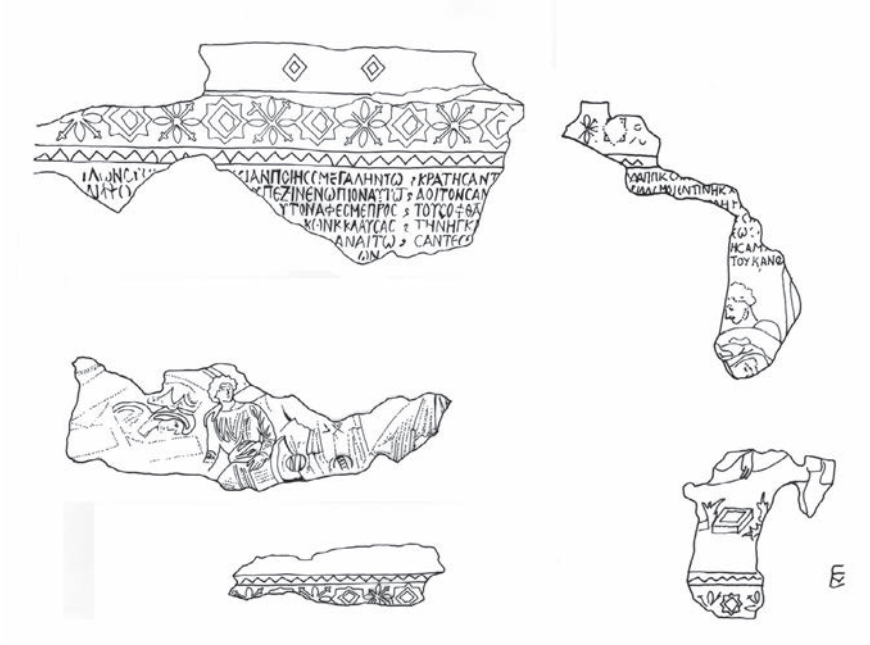

Figure 5.12 Drawing of the Samson mosaics, aisle of the church at Mopsuestia (modern Misis), Turkey, fifth century

Source: Drawing by Yvonne Beadnell

over around twenty-three meters of the north aisle of the building; and the nave pavement was decorated with an elaborate mosaic of Noah's ark and its animals.[125] Despite our relatively poor knowledge of the mosaics, an examination of the relationship between the texts and images of the mosaics significantly deepens our understanding of the range of uses of biblical quotations in the period.

Following Ernst Kitzinger's reading of the mosaics, the church (?) aisle was decorated with eleven scenes from Samson's life, running from the east to the west: Samson as a youth, killing a lion (Judges 14:5–6); his discovery of honey in the dead lion's mouth (14:9); the foxes episode (15:4–5); the slaying of the Philistines, very fragmentary (15:15); Samson crying out to God in thirst and receiving water (15:18); his visit to a sex worker at Gaza (16:1–3); miraculously carrying away the gates of Gaza (16:3); an unidentified scene featuring Samson's temptress, Delilah; Delilah cutting Samson's hair, robbing him of his strength (16:15–17); the blinding of Samson (16:21); and the end of the story, with the hero led by a boy and the collapse of the Philistine house (16:23–8).[126] The Greek texts presented variously quote or paraphrase passages from the Septuagint version of the narrative, identifying the scenes depicted below (or in one case, above) and encouraging the reader to focus on specific narrative components of

the episodes.[127] No frames or borders separate the scenes, which are laid out in a single strip from the sanctuary in the east to the front of the nave in the west; but the inscriptions do seem to have been divided so the viewer could have read them along with the relevant scenes.[128]

Kitzinger and others have found the texts difficult to read alongside the scenes due to the length of the passages, and they dismiss the texts as borrowings from the tradition of manuscript illumination[129] or as authenticators of the biblical origin of the images.[130] While both of these theories may be correct, the texts were legible to those who took the time to read them, and their format and appearance emphasizes their readability: the inscriptions are, with one exception, aligned with the north border of the pavement, organized in orderly blocks of text, written in a fine script that borrows another attention-grabbing tool from the realm of manuscripts, that of red-black alternation, an extended form of rubrication.[131] The fragmentary state of the evidence makes it difficult to compare texts to images directly, but the extant inscriptions indicate that the texts would have acted as conceptual frames for the discrete episodes, isolating each from the episodes next to it to enable viewers to focus on each scene in its turn.[132] Combined, text and image at Mopsuestia present an extremely detailed version of the Samson narrative, one that rewards repeated reflection, allowing audiences to shift their attention back and forth between the two and discern variations that could prompt a discussion of Samson's heroic acts, and his role as a type of Christ, or his tragic flaws, especially his seduction by Delilah.[133]

The Samson mosaics from Mopsuestia are unique in terms of surviving examples of floor mosaics that pair lengthy narrative *tituli* with corresponding scenes. However, one other set of image programs includes relatively extensive texts, that of the "peaceful kingdom," a subject derived from the Book of Isaiah 11:6 that uses juxtapositions of animals that are natural enemies to generate a vision of the peaceful kingdom to come. Because of its appealing message of a peaceful future, this particular subject was popular in churches and synagogues alike.[134] The earliest extant example of the program, from the east end of the pavement of the so-called Necropolis Church at Anemurium (modern Anamur) in Cilicia, dated to the mid-to-late fifth century, features a leopard and goat flanking a central tree, bending their heads downward, and above them is inscribed a slightly out-of-order version of the Septuagint text of Isaiah 11:6: "[and the] small child will lead them, and the leopard will lie down with [the kid]" ([καὶ παιδίον] μικρὸν ἄξι αὐτοὺς καὶ πάρδ̣[α]λι[ς] συν̣[αναπ]αύσετ[αι ἐρίφῳ]) (Figure 5.13).[135] By including the text along with the image, the artists make explicit that this otherwise common scene of two confronted animals is a specific representation of the kingdom of God, a powerful image-text combination to place in front of the altar.[136] Not all elements of the text are present in the image – for example, the "small child" is missing – but it does represent the leopard and the kid, animals that are natural enemies, peacefully inhabiting the same space.

Versions of the same program decorate the nave pavements of two other churches in the same region of Cilicia: the church at Karlık, dated to the late fifth or early sixth century,[137] and the Cathedral of Korykos, probably dated to the fifth

Figure 5.13 "Peaceful kingdom" mosaic, pavement of the east end of the Necropolis Church, Anemurium (modern Anamur), Turkey, mid-to-late fifth century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Sheila Campbell

century.[138] The Karlık church features a greatly expanded program: the inscription includes more of the biblical passage (excerpting Isaiah 11:6–9), again inscribed out of order, and the animals appear in pairs below the text, except the pair of the stag and elephant in the third register of the mosaic, neither of which appears in the biblical vision (Figure 5.14).[139] At Karlık, the motif has been adapted to suit a desire for images of familiar and exotic animals, in line with the regional popularity of animal pavements.[140] The pavement of the Korykos church survives in an extremely fragmentary state, but preserves a portion of Isaiah 11:6, as well as a lioness, a leopard, and a ram. Parts of the next line of the text, Isaiah 11:7 – "The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox" – feature in two other buildings along with animal images: in a church at Mariana on the island of Corsica, dated to the late fifth or early sixth century;[141] and the Acropolis Church at Maʿin in Jordan, dated by inscription to 719/720.[142] The Mariana church pavement, also quite fragmentary, is unusual because of its location in the west, and it appears to be closest in conception to the Anemurium pavement, even down to the guilloche border that frames the panel in both instances. A closely related text from Isaiah, Isaiah 65:26, "The wolf and the lamb will graze together," appears in Hebrew in the pavement of the theological school (*beit hamidrash*) at the synagogue at Meroth in the Galilee, dated to the eighth century.[143] Surviving into the period of Umayyad rule in the region, the versions

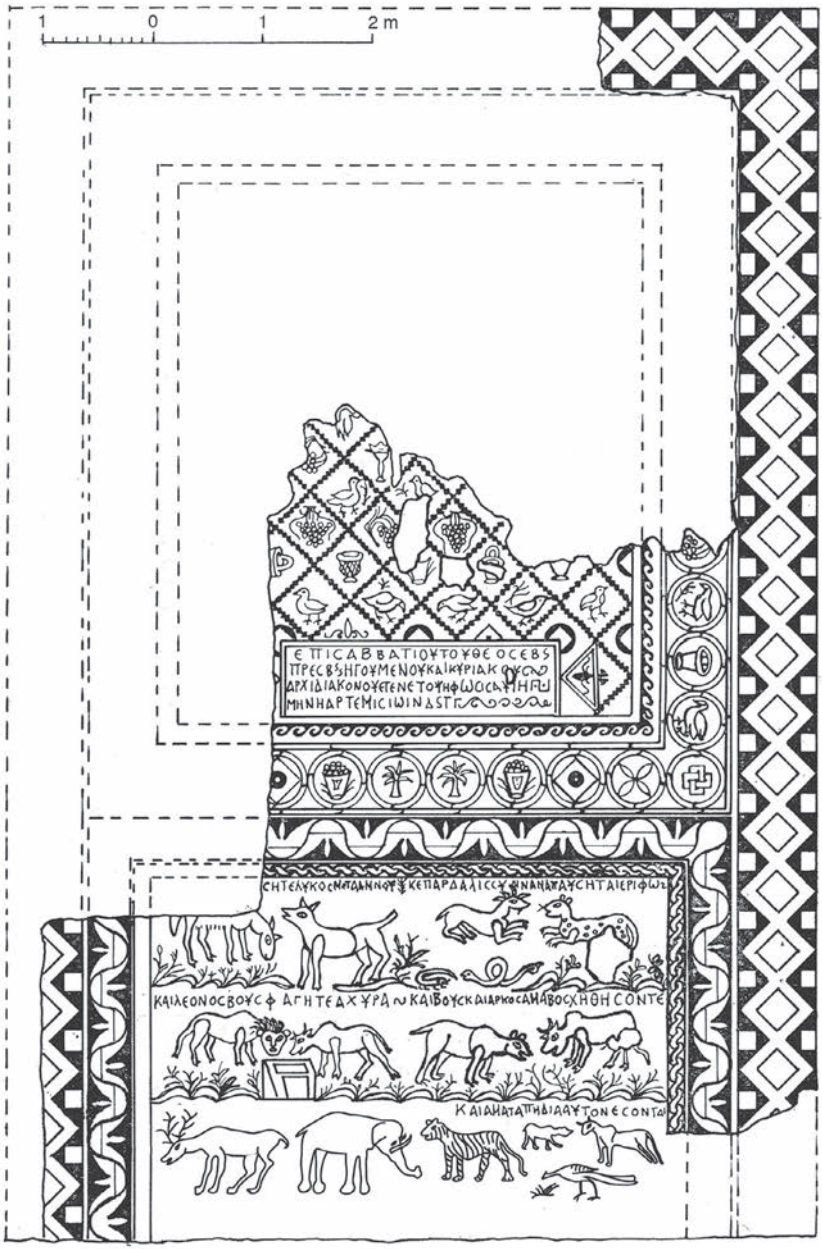

Figure 5.14 "Peaceful kingdom" mosaic, pavement of the church at Karlık, Turkey, late fifth or early sixth century

Source: Drawing by Yvonne Beadnell

at Meroth and Maʿin are similar in organization, featuring confronted animals – a wolf and a lamb at Meroth, an ox and a (missing) lion at Maʿin – though both are damaged, the Maʿin example by later iconoclasts, who removed an image of an ox and replaced it with trees, a vine, and an amphora.

While the "peaceful kingdom" scheme had a trans-Mediterranean appeal for Christians and, in at least one case, Jews, the earliest extant examples all come from Cilicia, suggesting that the program, at least in its mosaic form, was invented in a workshop in that region. That a verson of the subject should appear in a Jewish house of study makes sense, as its biblical context relates to God's promise to turn Jerusalem into a peaceful city for the Jews (Isaiah 65:17–25).[144] The scheme has been linked variously to the hope for peace between Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian Christians (Miaphysites) during the intense Christological debates of the fifth century,[145] as well as to the baptismal rite,[146] although the latter connection is especially tenuous, as none of the surviving examples relate directly to any baptismal spaces. What is clear is that with the exception of the Karlık pavement, with its procession of animals, the four pavements are closely related, each presenting a rectangular panel featuring two animals that are natural enemies facing each other. In this sense, the inscription particularizes an otherwise generic program of confronted animals, presenting a clear biblical reading of the image.[147] It is unclear if the promise of the peaceful kingdom is implicit in these pavements and would have been understood by the sixth-century viewer absent an inscription, or if the images had gone rogue and were picked by patrons and artists for their popularity, formal balance, and suitability for a variety of spaces within churches.[148] As a composite text-image program, the motif presents a "peaceful" alternative to the frequent scenes of animal chases or combats that were popular choices for the floors of churches in the eastern Mediterranean; and, for Christian audiences, it reflects the application of the same typological lens we have seen previously in service of Christianizing an originally Jewish messianic image.

A final program that combines image and text in service of a biblical subject is that of Psalm 50 (51):19: "then they shall offer young bulls upon your [God's] altar" (τότε ἀνοίσουσιν ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριόν σου μόσχους). This subject survives in three churches in modern Jordan, within a relatively small region around Mount Nebo, the mountain from which Moses was said to have seen the Promised Land.[149] The earliest of these, placed in the west end of the nave pavement in the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius at Khirbet Mukhayyat (built 557/558) is oriented towards the west, and would have been read by worshippers as they left the church after services (Figure 5.15).[150] In the accompanying image, placed immediately above (to the west) of the inscription within the same framed panel, two bulls process towards a stone altar with a central niche and a small fire burning on top. The text of this popular psalm, included in the liturgy of the region in the period, is one of repentance and involves the speaker asking God for mercy and salvation.[151]At Khirbet Mukhayyat, the text of the psalm is inscribed in order for the Christian community to celebrate the victory (for them) of Christian forms of worship over Jewish traditions of animal sacrifice from the past, but also

Figure 5.15 Psalm 50 (51):19 in mosaic image and text, west end of the nave pavement, Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius, Khirbet Mukhayyat (Nebo), Jordan, 557/558

Source: Judith McKenzie/Manar al-Athar

to particularize and biblicize the otherwise popular scene of confronted animals. Two other versions of this subject, from the seventh-century Theotokos Chapel at the Basilica of Moses on Mount Nebo,[152] and the eighth-century Acropolis Church at Maʿin, which also featured the "peaceful kingdom" motif,[153] transplant the paired text-image program to the floor in front of the altar, strengthening the juxtaposition between (former) Jewish and Christian worship.

All of the texts drawn from the Hebrew Bible emphasize different events in the sacred narrative, but they share a brevity that would have allowed readers to digest them quickly, particularizing scenes that might in some cases have been viewed merely as images of popular animals. The texts serve to vivify the figures of animals and people, presenting an authorized biblical frame for the scenes. More popular in Christian spaces but also present in some synagogues, conjoined programs of biblically derived image and text reveal the flexible ways that images on the floors of sacred buildings could be combined, allowing artists and patrons to highlight issues of local concern (e.g. peace) or, alternatively, the superiority of their faith over a competing one.

Viewing sacred speech: the unfurled scroll

Only a handful of narrative "titles" in verse or prose have survived in combination with the images with which they were meant to be read, either on the wall or the floor. However, a group of images featuring textual complements, images of holy figures holding scrolls or open books (codices) that bear texts, is extant on the walls of Christian buildings. Even absent any inscriptions, or perhaps bearing pseudo-text, these scrolls or books function as symbols of identity and authority.[154] When they do display texts, these surfaces take on a particular significance, allowing otherwise silent figures to speak. Unlike the author portraits, especially of the Evangelists, familiar from Byzantine and medieval manuscripts, the images of Christ or the saints holding inscribed scrolls or books emphasize not the act of writing-in-progress, but the display of the completed text.[155] While the scroll had been rendered an antiquated technology by the end of the late antique period due to the rise of the codex, in the fourth through sixth centuries in particular it maintained a strong association with biblical, even eschatological, authority, a link made in the New Testament, as in Revelation 5, in which one of the angels asks, "who is worthy to open the scroll by breaking its seals?" (Revelation 5:2). The answer, of course, is Christ in the form of the Son of Man.

The image of a figure holding up their words for viewers to read was of course neither a new one in late antiquity nor a Christian one. Now on display in the Bardo Museum in Tunis, originally from the floor of an early third-century house in the coastal city of Hadrumetum (modern Sousse), a mosaic of Virgil features the Roman poet holding a scroll that opens across his lap (Figure 5.16).[156] On the scroll is written a short excerpt from Book 1 of the *Aeneid*, the poet's most famous work (here in bold): "**Tell me, o muse, the cause; wherein thwarted in will or wherefore angered**, did the Queen of heaven drive a man, of goodness so wondrous, to traverse so many perils, to face so many toils?"[157] Flanked by two muses – Melpomene, muse of tragedy, and Clio, muse of history, who also holds a scroll – Virgil is depicted in the act of receiving inspiration for his tale of the hero Aeneas, making visually present the act described on the scroll. By presenting only a small portion of the text, the mosaic encourages learned viewers to finish the passage, which sets the stage for the rest of the work, defining Juno's anger at Aeneas as the driving force of the narrative. Here, Virgil is shown as a divinely inspired author of a beloved work of poetry.[158] We have seen a text excerpted from the *Aeneid* paired with an image earlier in this chapter, at the Lullingstone villa in Britain. However, the text-in-image combination from Hadrumetum is different in character, as it actually integrates the author's words into his image: it is both an image of a text and one that can be read.

The earliest known Christian version of a similar program from a monumental context is the now-lost fourth-century apse mosaic of Old St. Peter's in Rome. While the mosaic does not survive, drawings made of it before the building's demolition preserve at least some evidence for the arrangement of the figures within the composition, if not the style of the work.[159] According to these drawings, in the center of the apse, the apostles Peter and Paul, named in both Greek

Figure 5.16 Mosaic of Virgil holding a scroll with quotation from the *Aeneid*, from the pavement of a house at Hadrumetum (modern Sousse), Tunisia, early third century, now in the Bardo Museum, Tunis

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

and Latin, stood to either side of the enthroned Christ and held scrolls in their left hands inscribed with the words they spoke to Christ according to the New Testament. Through his scroll, Peter proclaimed, "You are Christ, Son of the Living God" (*Tu es Chr(istu)s, filius Dei vivi*) (Matthew 16:16). On the other side of Christ, Paul cried out, "For me, to live is Christ" (*Mihi vivere Chr(istu-)s est*) (an abbreviated version of Philippians 1:21). In the St. Peter's apse, the inscribed scrolls served to vivify the figures, enlivening their connections to the central figure, Christ, and presenting two important moments in the narratives of the apostles: the moment when Peter recognizes Christ as the son of God, which immediately precedes Christ's proclamation that the apostle is the "rock" on which the church will be built; and Paul's decision to live to continue to spread the faith rather than suffer martyrdom at the hands of the Romans. When read silently

or aloud, these two texts allowed readers to play characters in a sacred drama, consistent with the classical rhetorical practice of *ethopoeia*, the "imitation" (*mimesis*) of a speaking figure, still alive in the late antique period and beyond.[160] Combined, the two inscribed messages present both a confirmation of Christ's nature and a model for Christian readers to follow, living their lives in service of Christ. This type of pairing of holy figures – saints, or Old Testament prophets – with scrolls inscribed with their words was frequently used in Byzantine mosaic programs of the later ninth and tenth centuries, as in the tympanum mosaics of Hagia Sophia, installed after the official end of Iconoclasm, which were described by the patriarch Photios in his speech on the occasion of the mosaics' dedication as images in which each figure "cries out his sayings of yore," fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Christ.[161]

In other extant images of Christ and his two chief apostles from late antique churches in Italy, Christ sometimes holds a scroll that bears an inscription. However, unlike those held by Peter and Paul in the Old St. Peter's apse, Christ's scrolls do not "speak" his words. Instead, these short texts act as labels for the particular symbolic relevance of the scroll, as in the late fourth- or early fifth-century apsidiole mosaic of Santa Costanza in Rome, where Christ presents an unrolled scroll to Peter which reads, "The Lord gives peace" (*Dominus pacem dat*) (Figure 5.17).[162] The presence of this phrase has encouraged art historians to view the mosaic as a depiction of the *traditio legis* (Christ giving the new Christian law to Peter),[163] but here "peace" (*pacem*) could also suggest a funerary reading in the context of the building it decorates, an interpretation that makes sense in the context of the

Figure 5.17 Christ giving the Law to Peter, apsidiole mosaic, Santa Costanza, Rome, late fourth or early fifth century

Source: Photograph by author

building's original function as a mausoleum for one of Constantine's female relatives, most likely his daughter Constantina.[164] References to peace, including the common epigraphic formula *requiescit/requiescat in pace*, are typical in funerary inscriptions in fourth-century Italy and elsewhere.[165] The text on the scroll potentially expresses hope for either political calm or the "peace of the church." Depending on the date of the mosaic, in its local Roman context, this message could imply a "peace" to end one of several conflicts involving the bishop (later, Pope) of Rome: a disagreement between bishop and emperor (as between Liberius and Constantius II, which resulted in the former's exile from Rome), for example, or religiously motivated violence between candidates for bishop, including that which swept Rome in 366 during the contest between Damasus and Ursinus.[166] In a liturgical context, "peace" was a way to connect the presiding priest, who uttered the blessing of peace ("Peace be with you") as part of the service, to Christ, as in the now-lost mosaics of Notre Dame de la Daurade, in Toulouse, in which Christ held a codex inscribed with that same blessing.[167] While some of these readings may be more plausible than others, the inscription is inherently a multivalent text that works to unite the authority of God and Christ, the concept of the hierarchical church built on Christ's transfer of authority to Peter, and the hope for peace in this life and the next.

Christ is not only depicted with a scroll in scenes where he appears with the apostles. In the apse mosaic of the monastery church of Hosios David in Thessaloniki, Christ holds an inscribed scroll whose text enhances the typological and prophetic significance of the image in which it appears **(see Color Plate 26)**. The mosaic, generally dated to the fifth or sixth century, appears to relate to the apocalyptic visions of the Old and New Testaments but does not precisely illustrate any one particular vision.[168] Beneath the image, a dedicatory inscription in two lines of silver tesserae on a red background runs below the image, identifying the church, paid for by an anonymous female donor, as "a life-giving spring," πηγὴ ζ(ω)τική.[169] Within the image, texts and textuality play a crucial role: a youthful, beardless Christ holds an inscribed scroll, the prophet to his left (possibly Ezekiel or Habbakuk) holds an inscribed codex, and the four creatures or signs of the Evangelists appear around Christ, each carrying a closed golden codex. The traditional association of prophets from the Hebrew Bible with scrolls is reversed in the mosaic, as the prophet to the right of the mosaic holds a codex,[170] while Christ holds a scroll on which is inscribed in twelve lines:

+ Ἰδοὺ ὁ θ(εὸ)ς
ἡμῶν, ἐ-
φ᾽ ᾧ ἐλπίζο-
μεν κ(αὶ) ἠγαλ-
λιώμεθα
ἐπὶ τῇ σωτ-
ηρίᾳ ἡ-
μῶν ὅτι ἀ-
νάπαυσιν

δώσει ἐπὶ
τὸν οἶκον
τοῦτον.

Behold our God, in whom we hope, and we rejoiced in our salvation, that he may give rest in this house.[171]

These words, a version of Isaiah 25:9–10, are not spoken by Christ in the Bible, but are those that will be proclaimed by the people at the reappearance of God or, in the Christian version, of Christ at the Second Coming, simultaneously making the crowd of the faithful present in the image and giving readers in the church a prepackaged verbal response to the image that describes and exalts. These two crowds – the crowd of believers present at Christ's reappearance, and that present in the church at Thessaloniki – are collapsed together, just as the inscription also condenses the Septuagint version of the text and substitutes the phrase "this house" (τὸν οἶκον τοῦτον) for "this mountain," transforming the church into the mountain of God, the purported location of the Second Coming.[172] By writing the words of a prophet onto Christ's scroll, an object that portends the Second Coming in the eschatology of Revelation 5–9, the program transfers prophetic authority to Christ, neatly collapsing the distance between the words of the prophets and the events of the New Testament.

From scroll to book

Where the scroll was associated with the authority of venerable scripture, the book or codex was a novel surface for text in the period. The invention of the codex and its gradual replacement of the scroll (or roll) has been a popular topic of study, still dominated by the fundamental work of Kurt Weitzmann.[173] Here, we are less concerned with the technological innovation of the codex than with the ways in which it was imagined, depicted, and imbued with a distinct set of meanings. In art of the fifth and sixth centuries, the codex began to replace the scroll as a marker of identification, authority, and the textuality of the New Testament in general, and of the Gospels in particular. Just as the scroll could be elevated to the status of luxury object through purple dye and gold and silver ink, the codex signified the wealth and status of its patron and owner through its jeweled covers.[174] On display as part of the procession that made up the First Entry of the Byzantine rite, the bejeweled covers, rich bindings and elaborate page markers of gospel books were luxurious details noted by authors, details that often were imported into their representations.[175]

The open codex appears in Christian images as early as the fourth century, including in the ceiling vault painting of an enthroned Christ surrounded by Peter and Paul and the martyrs in the Catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter in Rome, where Christ holds an open codex in his left hand (Figure 5.18).[176] Its pages are inscribed with the Alpha and Omega (A Ω), echoing the same letters inscribed next to Christ's head, conveying his message in the Book of Revelation that

Figure 5.18 Christ enthroned and holding an open codex, Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, fourth century

Source: Photograph © DeA Picture Library/Art Resource, NY

he is "the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 22:13). While the Greek letters lend a powerful eschatological layer of meaning to the image, the text presented is a heavily reduced version of the original Gospel text, a testament to the popularity of the passage and to the use of abbreviated *nomina sacra*, names or titles for Christ and other holy figures.

More typically, Christ's open book presents his own words from the Gospels to the viewer, allowing him to speak. In the antechamber of the small sixth-century *cappella arcivescovile* attached to the bishop's residence at Ravenna, Christ, dressed in military garb, holds a codex whose pages are inscribed with the words of John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (*Ego sum via veritas et vita* +) (Figure 5.19).[177] In the mosaic placed over the exit of the chapel, this passage, in which Christ comforts his disciples about their future path, becomes a communal

Figure 5.19 Christ depicted as a warrior stepping on a snake and a lion, mosaic of the antechamber of the chapel of the archbishop's palace (*cappella arcivescovile*), Ravenna, 493–519

Source: Photograph © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY

decree spoken to passersby, primarily the bishop and other clerics, which also casts these readers in the role of disciples when they read it aloud.[178] A variant of the phrase is inscribed in Christ's book in the triumphal arch mosaics of the Basilica Eufrasiana at Poreč, in modern Croatia: "I am the true light" (*Ego sum lux vera*).[179] This latter version is not strictly scriptural but echoes many concepts present in the Gospels, including the assertion in John 1:9 that Christ's coming into the world was the birth of the "true light" (*lux vera . . .*). In the Poreč church, the guiding message of Christ, who is depicted on the triumphal arch performing the gesture of speech with his right hand, would have been reinforced by the readings of these particular Gospel passages during the liturgy. This association between Christ and light continued into the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and in later Byzantine churches Christ's codex is typically inscribed with a related passage, John 8:12: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."[180]

However, while the inscribed books at Ravenna and Poreč are sixth-century examples of a textuality that would become traditional in later centuries, in the period before Iconoclasm, codices held by Christ displayed many different texts, revealing the popularity as well as the flexibility of the motif as it was adapted to serve different contexts and convey a range of meanings. In the apse of the fifth-century Church of San Giovanni Evangelista, also in Ravenna, though no longer extant, Christ's open book quoted part of the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:7), "Blessed are the merciful, for God will show them mercy" (*Beati misericordes, quoniam miserabitur Deus*).[181] Text and codex took on an additional significance in this mosaic, as twelve additional codices appeared around Christ. This iconography is unique, but it appears to be a substitution of generic sign (book) for figure (apostle) and may also have had an apocalyptic significance for some viewers, who would perhaps have attached additional importance to the twelve books that floated around the central figure.

The mid-sixth-century apse mosaic of the small Church of San Michele in Africisco, originally in Ravenna and now in the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst in Berlin, also presented Christ speaking through his codex: on the left page, "He who has seen me has also seen the Father" (+ *Qui vidit me vidit et patrem*) (John 14:9); and on the right, "I and the Father are one" (*Ego et pater unum sumus*) (John 10:30).[182] While the mosaic as it exists today is effectively a nineteenth-century reconstruction, the work was produced based upon drawings of the sixth-century original made in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Figure 5.20).[183] Although the style and some of the details of the work might be modern inventions, it is possible that the imagery of the mosaic reproduces at least part of the sixth-century original. The two quotations from the Gospel of John are not attested in late antique mosaics elsewhere, but were used by Chalcedonian Christians to defend Christ as *homoousios* with God against the claims of divergent traditions such as Arianism, whose followers believed that Christ was created by God, and thus separate from, and subordinate to, him.[184] The mosaic's central image, of a youthful, beardless Christ standing in a paradisiacal landscape, flanked by the archangels Gabriel and Michael, and holding an

Figure 5.20 Christ with Archangels Michael and Gabriel, restored apse mosaic of San Michele in Africisco, Ravenna, c. 545–546, now in the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Berlin

Source: bpk Bildagentur/Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst/Jürgen Liepe/ Art Resource, NY

open codex inscribed with Trinitarian texts, parallels the doctrinal argument of the inscriptions, as Christ appears as a bearded adult enthroned in the mosaics of the triumphal arch, immediately above his image in the apse.[185] The words of the open codex in the apse are transformed into images to be seen, so that the viewer observed Christ as both the Son and the Father.

In some cases, Christ could also speak the words that others had written about him. He sits enthroned in the seventh-century apse mosaic of the Pantocrator Church at Herakleia near Latmos in Turkey, and makes the gesture of speech with his right hand, while holding with his left hand a codex inscribed with the words of John 1:1: "In the beginning was the word (λόγος)," verbally emphasizing his own identity as *logos*.[186] In the apse of Chapel XVII of the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit in Egypt, painted at some point between the sixth and eighth centuries, Christ sits enthroned within a mandorla of light from which the four creatures of the Evangelists radiate, and holds an open codex in which is written, "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Ἅγιος, Ἅγιος, Ἅγιος).[187] This repeated word was the basis of the popular Trisagion hymn ("Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal"), sung in the liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and of St. James, Brother of Our Lord, and later

incorporated into the Byzantine rite.[188] The same phrase is found in two epiphanic visions in the Old and New Testaments, including Isaiah 6:3 ("Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory") and Revelation 4:8 ("Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come"). In the vision of Isaiah, the word "Holy" is repeated by one of the six-winged seraphim who stand above the enthroned God (Isaiah 6:1–4), while in the vision of John described in Revelation, the Four Creatures surrounding the throne of God cry out the words continuously (Revelation 4:1–8).[189] These Four Creatures, also symbols of the Four Evangelists, surround the throne of Christ in the Bawit apse. Rather than speaking his own words, Christ records his own praise spoken by the creatures. Through their performance of the Trisagion in the context of the liturgy in the chapel, the monks of Bawit would have interacted with the inscription, reading out a version of the text inscribed in the codex in praise of Christ and, in the process, preserving and reenacting (or in this case, preemptively acting out) the continuous praise-song of the Four Creatures.[190]

When held by saints, inscribed books functioned a bit differently than did Christ's book, as they rarely "speak" their own words but instead feature passages from the Hebrew Bible. On the triumphal arch mosaic of San Lorenzo fuori le mura in Rome, the saints Lawrence and Stephen appear to either side of the central tableau of Christ, St. Peter, and St. Paul, and hold open codices which are inscribed with texts from the Psalms (Figure 5.21).[191] The titular saint of the church, Lawrence, wears a golden toga and is connected iconographically to Christ through the processional cross he holds in the same hand as his book, which quotes Psalm 111 (112):9: "He [God] has distributed, He has given to the poor" (*Dispersit dedit pauperibus*). This text transfers the Old Testament praise to the saint, reminding the reader of his refusal to turn over the riches of the Church to the urban prefect of Rome in the mid-third century. Instead of presenting money, silver, and gold to the prefect, Lawrence distributed (*dispersit*) and gave (*dedit*) the earthly wealth to the poor, and presented the poor to the prefect as the true treasures of the Church.[192] The text inscribed within the saint's codex reminds the reader of his life, although it reads his deeds through the lens of the psalm rather than that of his *Vita*. Additionally, the remainder of Psalm 111, with its references to righteousness (Psalm 111:3–4, 6, 9), the "wealth and riches" of God's "house," that is, the Church (Psalm 111:3), as well as light, which "dawns in the darkness for the upright" (*Ortum est in tenebris lumen iustis*, Psalm 111:4), links the good deeds of the righteous Lawrence to the brightness of the sanctuary, emphasized by the two other inscriptions of the mosaic.[193] On the other side of Christ, St. Stephen holds a codex in his left hand, inscribed with the words of Psalm 62 (63):8: "My soul clings (to you [God])" (*Ad(h)esit anima mea*).[194] With his right hand, the saint "speaks" these words, addressing the psalm to Christ as well as to the viewer, at whom he looks directly. However, this text does not function in the same way as that of Lawrence, since it does not directly connect to the life of the saint, most famous for his status as the first Christian martyr who was executed as a heretic by the Sanhedrin of the Temple in Jerusalem (Acts 6–7).[195] Rather than evoking something particular about the saint who "speaks" it, the text inscribes the beginnings

Figure 5.21 Triumphal arch mosaic with saints Peter, Paul, Lawrence, and Stephen, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome, 579–590

Source: Photograph by author

(*incipits*) of the *antiphon* texts used for both Stephen and Lawrence, which would have been recited by the presiding priest to introduce the specific veneration of both saints as early as the fifth century.[196] The program props up the authority of the presiding priest as activator, putting the words of the saint directly into the mouth of the celebrant, or vice versa, the words of the priest into the mouth of the saint.

Titles for images?

As text was increasingly incorporated into or next to images from the fourth century onwards, *tituli* (short "titles," often in verse) took on a life of their own, and were transmitted in a purely textual format, as cycles of epigrams had been in earlier Greek and Roman times. The Graeco-Roman origins of *tituli* are fairly clear, but the extent to which some of the major Latin and Greek cycles of these texts actually appeared in sacred buildings is difficult to determine. Whether they appeared on a page or on a wall, "title" inscriptions were important devices for readers to think with, using elements of ekphrasis to vivify or dramatize images, drawing out particular aspects of the Old and New Testament stories depicted in

Christian buildings in particular. While images never needed words, texts could help viewers identify and (more often) interpret scenes, deepening their engagement with images. A close look at these words paired with images, including the wall mosaics of the west as well as the floors of the east, reveals artists, poets, and patrons composing often complicated image-word, or word-image, programs that amplified viewers' experiences of the figures illustrated. Inscriptions written onto images of text-bearing technologies – the scroll, or the book – allowed holy characters to speak, turning static mosaics or paintings into moving pictures, but also collapsing the biblical with the (late antique) contemporary. This condensing of time and, as in the case of the Madaba Map, of space, converted the church interior into a place for regular, active contact with the figures and events of the Bible that went far beyond the didactic: these words and images were not just "books for the illiterate," but multisensory happenings for a wide range of audiences.

Notes

1 Bikai and Dailey 1996. According to local oral tradition, conflicts with the Muslim community in Karak drove the Christian inhabitants to move to Madaba, where, according to Ottoman law, they were permitted to build churches upon sites associated with ancient Christian worship: Donner 1992, 11–12.
2 On iconoclasm in the region in the eighth century, Schick 1995; Ognibene 2002; Flood 2012; Schick 2015; Sahner 2017; Reynolds 2017.
3 The first publications of the mosaic include Lagrange 1897, 165–84; Schulten 1900. On the discovery of the mosaics, Meimaris 1999. The bibliography on the map is extensive: see especially Avi-Yonah 1954; Donner and Cüppers 1967; Tsafrir 1986; Donceel-Voûte 1988b; Piccirillo 1989a, 76–95, 1993, 26–33 (with the legends and their sources), 81–95; Piccirillo and Alliata 1999; Bowersock 2006, 65–90; Madden 2012; Talgam 2014, 239–44. While the scholarly consensus is that the map decorated the floor of a sixth-century church, the possibility has been raised recently that its original home may instead have been a secular building: Leal 2018.
4 On these mosaics, Piccirillo and Alliata 1994.
5 Exceptions include the image of the city of Nablus, which features the famous colonnaded street that led up to Mount Gerizim, the holy mountain of the Samaritans: Duval 2003b, 234–5.
6 Avi-Yonah 1954, who tries to match up the cities of the *Onomasticon* and the mosaic map; also Di Segni 1999. For an alternate opinion that sees the influence of the *Onomasticon* as minimal, Bowersock 2006, 1–30.
7 For example, near Gethsemane, the "fourth milestone" (τὸ τέταρτον) on the road from Jerusalem to Nikopolis (Diospolis) or Lod (Lydda).
8 Located immediately above a second potential baptism location, Bethabara: Donner 1992, 38. On a similar use of "now" (νῦν) by the sixth-century poet Romanos the Melodist to emphasize immediacy of experience, Krueger 2015, 121; also Gador-Whyte 2017.
9 Donner 1992, 70; the text is related to Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 50.1–12 and 166.20–1.
10 E.g. Judges 20:1; see Donner 1992, 70.
11 Donner 1992, 68; the lots of the tribes of Israel are described in Joshua 13–19.
12 Donner 1992, 61; the encounter between Abraham and the angels is described in Genesis 18:1.
13 Donner 1992, 69–70; the reference is to the events of Exodus 16:1–36; Numbers 11:4–34. A very similar series of red texts marks important locations in the Sinai desert: Weber 1999.

14 Ἰωσὴφ εὐλόγησέν σε ὁ θεὸς εὐλογίαν γῆς ἐχούσης πάντα, καὶ πάλιν ἀπ᾽εὐλογίας κ(υρίο)υ ἡ γῆ αὐτοῦ, combining Genesis 49:25 and Deuteronomy 33:13; see Donner 1992, 46–7. The other text appears directly below the name of the "lot of (the tribe of) Dan" at the bottom of the mosaic: "Why does he (Dan) remain in ships?" (Ἵνα τὶ παροι[κεῖ πλ]οίοις), Judges 5:17.
15 Bowersock 2006, 28.
16 On connections between late antique mapping traditions and pilgrimage travel, Johnson 2012b; more generally, Johnson 2016a; and on the sometimes unusual landscape features associated with biblical events, Johnson 2016b. For a discussion of the fascinating collection of stones and pieces of wood in the Vatican casket (also called the Sancta Sanctorum pilgrim box), each with its own place-name label, see recently Fricke 2014; Krueger 2015.
17 On the encapsulation of space within the Madaba church, Brubaker 2002, e.g. 249, who emphasizes the idea of control: "[the mosaics] encapsulate known space (or space imagined to be known) for a captive audience"; Dey 2014, 205: "[the mosaics were meant] to comfort and reinforce their [pilgrims'] sense of belonging to a Christian world-order that stretched (nearly) as far as the eye could see, or the mind could reach." On later medieval church inscriptions and their play with temporality, Debiais 2013.
18 On earlier Roman inscriptions within images, Corbier 1995; Bergmann 2007.
19 For a discussion of the functions of name labels in the period, Maguire 1996b, 101–45; Boston 2003; Kiilerich 2003; Maguire 2011b, 27–81.
20 Traube 1907, 2003; Hurtado 2006, 135–54; Heath 2010; Hurtado 2017; Squire and Whitton 2017.
21 The bibliography on these intriguing objects is growing rapidly: see especially Horsfall 1979; Squire 2010c, 2011; Petrain 2014. The backs of the tablets also bear inscriptions, including puzzle inscriptions such as magic squares: Squire 2011, 197–246.
22 On the original contexts of the works generally, Squire 2011; Petrain 2014. On their erudite character (and in contrast to earlier judgments on them, including by Horsfall 1979), Squire 2010c.
23 Squire 2010c, 77.
24 The inscription reads: *Invida si tauri vidisset Iuno natatus, iustius Aeolias isset ad usque domos*: Toynbee 1962, 200, no. 192, 1964, 263–4; Meates 1979, 75–8; Frere and Tomlin 1992, 86, no. 2448.6; Leader-Newby 2007, 191; Ling 2007, 78–9, fig. 13. Ling 2007, 79, disagrees with Martin Henig's interpretation of the inscription as concealing a crypto-Christian code: Henig 1997, 2000; Squire 2009, 169–71, 2017b, 48–9.
25 According to Virgil's tale, Juno's grudge derives partly from Aeneas's descent from Dardanus, son of Jupiter, and Electra, the daughter of Atlas: *Aeneid* 1.26–8. On the Roman tradition of Juno's hatred for Jupiter's offspring, Trinacty 2014, 130–1.
26 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.846–75; see Barrett 1978, 311–13. On the Roman dining room as a popular location for complicated image (and image/text) programs, Dunbabin 2003; on the Roman *cena* more generally, Booth 1991; Dunbabin 1996; Fredrick 2003; and on late antique *cena*, Leader-Newby 2004, 123–71. Other examples from domestic contexts include the third-century Magerius mosaic from a house in Smirat, Tunisia, now in the Sousse Museum, where a staged hunting (*venatio*) scene features the words spoken by the herald of the games and the subsequent acclamations of the crowd: Dunbabin 1978, 67–9, pls. 52–3, 1999a, 116–17; Leader-Newby 2007.
27 φθόνος τ᾽ἀπέστω τῆς ἀρετῆς τῆς ψη[φῖ]δος: Russell 1987, 39–49, no. 7; Dunbabin 1999a, 324; generally, Dunbabin and Dickie 1983; Dunbabin 1989; Romero 2014. Similar inscriptions praise the "grace" of the mosaic, as in the inscription paired with a mosaic of the tragic story of Hippolytus and Phaedra at Sheikh Zouède on the Sinai peninsula, which may come from a public building or a house: Ovadiah, Gomez de Silva, and Mucznik 1991.
28 Squire 2007, 2009, 202–38.

29 The epigrams are preserved as *AG* 3, and are described by a (possibly later?) introductory *lemma* as "epigrams [ἐπιγράμματα] on the stylopinakia [τὰ στυλοπινάκια, panels on the columns?] in the temple of Apollonis . . . at Cyzicus": Van Looy and Demoen 1986; Demoen 1988; Maltomini 2002; also Salvo 2013, 130–1. Unfortunately, the epigrams are the only surviving evidence of the temple and its reliefs.
30 On these latter mosaic texts, Leader-Newby 2007; Scheibelreiter-Gail 2012. On earlier mosaic inscriptions, Lancha 1997, 387–90, who references only five examples of Roman inscriptions from western provinces which quote literary texts; Notermans 2001; Squire 2009, 168–73.
31 *Pauci tamen versiculi lectorem adventicium remorabuntur minime improbo temperamento, quia eos nec relegisse desiderio est nec perlegisse fastidio:* Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letters* 2.2.7, trans. Anderson 1936, 423. On the fascinating visual-verbal oeuvre of Sidonius and his contemporaries, see especially Lobato 2012; Leatherbury 2017b.
32 See the discussion in Chapter 1.
33 On the general meaning of the term, Panciera 2012.
34 *Parve – nec invideo – sine me, liber, ibis in urbem. . . . Vade, sed incultus, qualem decet exulis esse . . . nec titulus minio, nec cedro charta notetur . . .* : Ovid, *Tristia*, 1.1.1–7, trans. Wheeler and Gould 1988, 3.
35 *Epigramma est titulus, quod in Latinum superscriptio interpretatur;* epi *enim super,* gramma *littera vel scriptio dicitur*: Isidore of Seville, *Etymologia* 1.39.22, trans. Barney, Lewis, Beach, and Berghof 2006, 66.
36 On Isidore's discussion of poetry and the etymologies of different poetic genres, Amsler 1989, 155–8.
37 While most texts referred to as *tituli* are poems, the ancient understanding of the term clearly encompassed prose texts as well: for example, the author of the Septuagint version of the Gospel of John (John 19:19) refers to the inscribed panel over Christ's head in the Crucifixion as a τίτλον, a Greek transcription of the Latin term; see Millar 1995.
38 Lubian 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016. Arnulf 1997, 48–50, defines the term more broadly, as a text that explains, references, or describes images (but as a different kind of text from donor inscriptions). These strategies were not unique to *tituli* on monumental works of art: see e.g. Lowden 1999, 45–8, on similar rhetorical strategies in short "label" texts in early illustrated bibles; and Krueger 2015, on liturgical hymns.
39 Scenes of Moses and Joshua appear on the right-hand wall, scenes of Abraham and his children on the left, and New Testament scenes are present on the triumphal arch: on the mosaics, Cecchelli 1956; Miles 1993; Neuman de Vegvar 2007.
40 The narrative cycle is not extant: Ihm 1960, 135–7; Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 125–9; Bovini 1971, 187.
41 Deichmann 1974, 154–88, 2010, 153–8; Dresken-Weiland 2016, 122–62.
42 Nilus, *Letter to Prefect Olympiodorus, PG* 79, 577–80, trans. Mango 1972, 32–3. On the identity of Nilus and his extensive corpus of letters, most of which were probably written by others, Caner 2010, 73–5, 138–9. While Thümmel 1978, followed by Brubaker and Haldon 2011, 46 n. 169, argues that the letter was an eighth-century interpolation invented to support iconophiles during Byzantine Iconoclasm, its association with the genuine *Letter to Heliodorus the Silentiary* and its knowledge of the fifth-century context of church decoration argue for its authenticity, even if it was later edited, probably in the sixth century: Alan Cameron 1976b, 189–92.
43 A large bibliography exists on this trope: see especially Kessler 1985b; Schmitt 1988; Chazelle 1990, 1995; Wataghin 2002.
44 Gregory, *Laudatio Sancti Theodori*, *PG* 46, 737D, trans. Mango 1972, 37.
45 Basil, *Homily* 19 ("In sanctos quadraginta martyres"), *PG* 31, 509A; on this passage, Duggan 1989, 228.
46 Paulinus, *Carmen* 27.541–51; for a critical view of the traditional reception of Paulinus's advice, arguing for the *tituli* as crucial interpretative tools for viewers (in Paulinus's mind), Conybeare 2000, 91–110; Kaesser 2002, 162–5, 2010.

47 Gregory, *Epistulae* 9.209 (first letter to Serenus) and 10.10 (second letter to Serenus), ed. Norberg 1982, 768, 873–6.
48 John of Damascus, *Pro sacris imaginibus orationes tres* 1.39–41; *PG* 94, 1232A–1420C.
49 On different audiences reading *tituli* and images together, and the ways in which images could supplement texts through their structure, order (typology), and style, Van Dael 1999.
50 The fundamental work on *tituli* remains Arnulf 1997; also Bernt 1968; Belting-Ihm 1994; Dijkstra 2016, 49–58. Most recently, Francesco Lubian has published on specific cycles of *tituli* and their relationship to the classical tradition of building epigrams: see *supra* n. 38.
51 Prudentius, *Tituli Historiarum (Dittochaeon)*, trans. Thomson 1953, 346–73. On the epigrams, see especially Pillinger 1980, who argues that the cycle could have been illustrated as a whole, as all poems but one have visual analogs from the period; Davis-Weyer 1986b; Arnulf 1997, 67–110; Smolak 2010; Dijkstra 2016, 196–7; Lubian 2016; O'Hogan 2016, 149–51, who emphasizes Prudentius's preference for text over image.
52 In Ravenna, the scenes from Christ's life; in Rome, the mosaics of Old Testament scenes in Santa Maria Maggiore, as well as the lost painted cycle of Old and New Testament scenes from the nave walls of San Paolo fuori le mura: see e.g. Arnulf 1997, 67–109.
53 *Testes bis seni lapides, quos flumine in ipso constituere patres in formam discipulorum*: Prudentius, *Dittochaeon* 15, trans. Thomson 1953, 353. However, while typology is built into the poems, the arrangement of scenes need not have been typological: see Arnulf 1997, 106–9.
54 Cecchelli 1956, 175–6, pl. XL.
55 E.g. Brenk 1975, 151–2; Kessler 2007, 122–4.
56 Lehmann 2010 argues that the inscriptions would not have fitted into Santa Sabina.
57 Merkle 1896; Arnulf 1997, 111–13. The most recent edition of the poems is Lubian 2017.
58 Arnulf 1997, 116–36; Lubian 2015.
59 These poems were apparently meant for the Cathedral at Tours: Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina* 10.6.91–2, "*Ad ecclesiam Toronicam quae per Gregorium episcopum renovata est,"* ed. Leo 1881, 234–8; trans. Kessler 1985a, 76–7; Brennan 1996; Roberts 2009, 189–99. On the *carmina*, Le Blant 1856, 251–5; Delehaye 1919. The related *Life* of Martin is also by Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita S. Mart. Dedicatio*, ed. Leo 1881, 293–371. On the *Life*, de Nie 1997, reprinted in de Nie 2003; Roberts 2002.
60 On the basilica, Chevalier 1888; Lelong 1986. On the *tituli*, Pietri 1983, 372–405, 798–822; Pietri 1984, 1988; Pietri and Biarne 1987, 32–4; Van Dam 1993, 308–17.
61 The term "interpretative voice over" is borrowed from Brian Brennan's discussion of Venantius Fortunatus's *tituli* for the sixth-century Cathedral of Tours: Brennan 1996, 65.
62 The epitaph of Ennodius is *CIL* 5.6464; see Lubian 2015.
63 *Namque ab hexametris eminentium poetarum Constantii et Secundini vicinantia altari basilicae latera clarescunt, quos in hanc paginam admitti nostra quam maxume verecundia vetat, quam suas otiositates trepidantur edentem meliorum carminum comparatio premit . . . quam mediam loco, infimam merito despicabiliorem pronuntiari non imperitia modo sed et arrogantia facit, quapropter illorum iustius epigrammata micant quam istaec, quae imaginarie tantum et quodammodo umbratiliter effingimus*: Sidonius Apollinaris, *Letters* 2.10.3–4, trans. Anderson 1936, 465. Sidonius composed several inscriptions that he claims were meant to be written onto buildings or objects; on a different epigram, composed by the poet for a silver bowl, Leatherbury 2017b.
64 Sidonius, *Letters* 2.10.4.
65 On the relationship between these different genres, Lubian 2011, 2013.

66 *Hic pretiosa Magi sub virginis ubere Christo dona ferunt puero . . .* : Prudentius, *Dittochaeon* 27.105–6, trans. Thomson 1953, 359.
67 O'Hogan 2016, 150.
68 The letter is *Epistle* 32, ed. von Hartel 1894a, 29, 10, trans. Goldschmidt 1940, 38–47. On the *tituli*, Engemann 1974; Lehmann 1992, 255–8, 281, with previous bibliography, who argues that, based upon its structure, the apse inscription was likely to have been arranged in two columns; Arnulf 1997, 55–60; Trout 1999, 151–3; Conybeare 2000; Mratschek 2002; Brandenburg and Pani 2003; Arnulf 2004, 85–7; Lehmann 2004. Herbert de la Portbarré-Viard 2006, 519–22. On the apse mosaic in particular, Wickhoff 1889; Rizza 1948; Weis 1957; Ihm 1960, 179–82; Hellemo 1989, 90–7.
69 On this structure, recently, Yasin 2015b.
70 Franz Wickhoff, for example, proposes a jeweled cross surrounded by a field of stars and a jeweled wreath: Wickhoff 1889. Bandmann 1952 proposes a jeweled cross surrounded by a circular wreath, with rays of light radiating from the cross. For reproductions of these two proposed versions, Herbert de la Portbarré-Viard 2006, 519–20, Annexe II, figs. 1–2. Both reconstructions owe a great deal to the extant sixth-century apse mosaic in Sant'Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna: on that mosaic, Deichmann 1976, 245–72; Deliyannis 2010, 267–74; Dresken-Weiland 2016, 257–69.
71 Maguire 1974; James and Webb 1991; Squire 2009, 139–46; Webb 2009, 7–9.
72 *[F]ucata coloribus umbra, quae super exprimitur titulis, ut littera monstret quod manus explicuit . . .* : Paulinus, *Carmen* 27.583–5, ed. von Hartel 1894b, 288.
73 See the previous discussion in Chapter 1. There continues to be a confusion about what Paulinus means here: Lehmann 2004, 212–13, argues that the passage does not provide any information about the placement of the *tituli vis-à-vis* their images; followed by Dijkstra 2016, 50–1. Paulinus uses the term "shadow painted with colors" (*fucata coloribus umbra*) to describe the images, recalling the Christian theorization of images, in which the completion of an image by the addition of colors parallels the "completion," or correction, of the Jewish Law by the coming of Christ.
74 *Epistle* 32.11, ed. von Hartel 1894a, 286–7; trans. Goldschmidt 1940, 38–41.
75 Paulinus, *Epistle* 32.10, ed. von Hartel 1894a, 286; trans. Goldschmidt 1940, 38, slightly adapted:

> *Pleno coruscat trinitas mysterio:*
> *stat Christus agno, vox patris caelo tonat*
> *et per columbam spiritus sanctus fluit.*
> *Crucem corona lucido cingit globo,*
> *cui coronae sunt corona apostoli,*
> *quorum figura est in columbarum choro.*
> *Pia trinitatis unitas Christo coit*
> *habente et ipsa trinitate insignia:*
> *deum revelat vox paterna et spiritus,*
> *sanctam fatentur crux et agnus victimam,*
> *regnum et triumphum purpura et palma indicant.*
> *Petram superstat ipse petra ecclesiae,*
> *de qua sonori quattuor fontes meant,*
> *evangelistae viva Christi flumina.*

76 Paulinus was very aware of the tropes of classical ekphrasis, and includes a lengthier one on the very same church in the *Carmen* 27, where he paints a picture of himself leading his friend Nicetas around the renovated shrine: see Arnulf 1997, 60–4; also Goldhill 2012, 89–98.
77 This emphasis on animation was not unique to western descriptions of art and is a frequent trope of ekphraseis written in Greek: according to Chorikios, in the Church of St. Sergius at Gaza, the mosaic of the patron in the apse, Stephen, asks the saint to

accept the church as a gift (probably implying that the image included a model of the church), and the saint consents and "looks down upon the man with a gentle gaze": Chorikios, *Laudatio Marciani* 1.31–2, trans. Mango 1972, 62. On animation in late antique art generally, see especially Peers 2012.

78 Spieser 2011; Thunø 2015, 31–2.

79 On the *traditio legis*, an iconography whose precise implications are still debated, Schumacher 1959; Davis-Weyer 1961; Hellemo 1989, 65–89; recently, Bergmeier 2017. The scene is often found on early Christian sarcophagi: Koch 2000, 191–3.

80 *Iustitiae sedis, fidei domus, aula pudoris, / haec est quam cernis, pietas quam possidet omnis, / quae patris et fili virtutibus inclyta gaudet / auctoremq(ue) suum genitoris laudibus aequat*: the inscription appears in the ninth-century Sylloge Einsidlensis, *ILCV* 1, no. 1753; see Ruysschaert 1967–1968; Krautheimer 1987; Bowersock 2005, 11–12. A second inscription in the apse celebrated one of Constantine's military victories, possibly his defeat of Licinius at Chrysopolis in 324: *ILCV* 1, no. 1754.

81 As pointed out by Thunø 2015, 32.

82 For a discussion of the use of the second person in similar inscriptions, see the previous chapter.

83 The mosaic is no longer extant: Ihm 1960, 153–4; Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 131–4; Bovini 1971, 229; Humphries 2007, 43; Mathisen 2009. Neither Ihm nor Mathisen mentions the roundels below the scene of Christ enthroned on a globe and flanked by apostles, although they are clearly depicted in the illustration published by Ciampini 1690, Taf. LXXVII (a print after Ugonio); reproduced by Ihm 1960, pl. 4, 1.

84 On the left, *Tu p(ro) me navem liquisti, suscipe clavem*; on the right, *Quod nectes nectam, quod solves ipse resolvam*. The inscriptions are *ILCV* 1, no. 1637; also given by Ihm 1960, 153–4.

85 The episode of the apostles walking on water is also described in the Gospels of Mark 6:45–56 and John 6:16–21, though neither version singles out Peter specifically.

86 On the late antique understanding of scenes where a figure appears more than once, see Cyril of Alexandria, *Epistles* 16, *PG* 77, 220, trans. Mango 1972, 34.

87 See especially Mathisen 2009.

88 The inscription is *ICUR* 2, 71, 134, 152, 353, 439; *ILCV* 1, no. 1784. On the mosaics, see Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 135–42; Oakeshott 1967, 90–4; Budriesi 1968, 113–33; Bovini 1971, 241–55.

89 *Sursum versa nutu quod cunctis cernitur uno, / praesul Honorius haec vota dicata dedit. / Vestibus et factis signantur illius ora. / Lucet et aspectu lucida corda gerens*: *ICUR* 2, 1, 104; *ILCV* 1, no. 1769A; also see Ihm 1960, 142; Thunø 2015, 24–6, 210.

90 *[L]umina cordis habes, animi radiante lucerna, et tuus aeterna luce coruscat apex*: Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina* 7.5.29–30 and 7.1.3, trans. de Nie 1997, 64–5.

91 *[Aspicis au]ratum caelesti [culmine tectum astrife]rum [qu]e micans preclaro lumine fultum*: *ICUR* 2, 1, 152, 440; Ihm 1960, 143; Thunø 2015, 214.

92 This is one of at least four inscriptions on the Moses scene, suggesting a fixation with pairing the images with short "label." On the synagogue inscriptions, Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 161–73 (Moses's inscription at 162–3); Fine 2011, 304. On the Christian inscriptions, which are placed in the scene of David and Goliath, Welles 1967, 97, nos. 19–20; Stern 2014, 147–9.

93 The poems are *AG* 1.37–89, though only *AG* 1.37–77 plausibly had architectural contexts, as the others (*AG* 1.78–89) were likely to have been captions in illuminated manuscripts: noted by Baldwin 1996, 101–2; Arnulf 1997, 141–5. On Agathias generally, Averil Cameron 1970. On the more famous poems of Agathias's *Cycle* (*Kuklos*), many of which presented a kind of classicizing gloss to the monuments of Constantinople, Cameron and Cameron 1966; McCail 1969; Garland 2011; Smith 2016.

94 Discussed by Baldwin 1996, 101. Arnulf 1997, 145, dates these to the fifth and sixth centuries.

95 E.g. *AG* 1.49, "On Lazarus": "Christ said 'Come here [πρόμολ᾽ ὧδε],' and Lazarus left Hades, recovering the breath in his withered nostrils"; trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 41.
96 Μελχισεδὲκ Βασιλεῦ, ἱερεῦ, ἄρτους τε καὶ οἶνον ὡς τίς ἐὼν παρέχεις; ὡς τύπος ἀτρεκίης: *AG* 1.66, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 47, adapted.
97 Ἀβραὰμ υἱὸν ἄγει θυσίην Θεῷ· ἵλαθι· ποίην νοῦς ὁράᾳ θυσίην, ἧς τόδε γράμμα τύπος: *AG* 1.65, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 47, slightly adapted.
98 Χαῖρε, κόρη χαρίεσσα, μακαρτάτη, ἄφθορε νύμφη· υἱὰ Θεοῦ λαγόνεσσιν ἄτερ πατρὸς ἔμβρουν ἔξεις: *AG* 1.44, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 39.
99 Ὦ πάθος, ὦ σταυρός, παθέων ἐλατήριον αἷμα, πλῦνον ἐμῆς ψυχῆς πᾶσαν ἀτασθαλίην: *AG* 1.54, trans. Paton and Tueller 2014, 43.
100 On the development of an iconography for the Crucifixion, see the work of McGowan 2009, 2013.
101 E.g. *AG* 1.50, on Lazarus: Bees 1953, 266.
102 Including both biblical scenes, such as Christ raising Lazarus from the dead, as well as others; for example, Christ crowing Justinian and Theodora: Grégoire 1922, 100; Verzone 1965; Foss 1980, 88–90; on the archaeological remains of the church, Thiel 2005.
103 The inscriptions are published by Habicht 1987, who points out that the inscriptions are not direct quotes of the related biblical passages but present variants that are compressed, presumably to fit onto the surface of the wall. On the paintings, Marzolff 1995. Outside of Demetrias, very few wall painting programs survive, though fragmentary evidence suggests that biblical texts were not infrequently painted onto walls: see, for example, the three lengthy quotations of Christ's words from the Gospels painted in red onto the wall of a building, possibly a church, near Hebron in Palestine, which may or may not have been paired with images: Lifshitz 1970, 77–9, pls. VI–VII; mentioned also by Di Segni 2017, Table 4.1. The texts quoted are Matthew 11:28 ("Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"), John 5:24 ("Who believes in me has eternal life; he dos not come into judgment"), and John 8:12 (Christ's words, "I am the light of life, and the light [is the life of humankind]").
104 Habicht 1987.
105 Floor mosaics survive in much greater numbers from buildings in the eastern Mediterranean: see most recently Hachlili 2009; Talgam 2014.
106 An exception is Arnulf 1997, 318–20, who does briefly consider some of the inscriptions on floors.
107 Κ(αὶ) ἔφαγον ἐγυμνόθη: The mosaic is now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, acc. no. 1969.115; Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 487, 489 fig. 456; Klein 2007, 50–1.
108 The mosaic has no published provenance prior to 1969, though at the time of its purchase was alleged to come from a town near Antioch: Klein 2007, 51.
109 Canivet and Canivet 1975, 56–7; Balty 1977, 128; Canivet and Canivet 1980, 1983; Balty 1984; Maguire 1987c, 367–73; Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 104–5, fig. 71.
110 Piccirillo 1993, 106. On nudity in Byzantine art generally, Smith 1978, 1–23; Miles 1989, 85–116; Dauterman Maguire and Maguire 2007, 97–134; Hatzaki 2008; Meyer 2009, especially 244.
111 Grabar 1968, 19–24, pl. 40; Jensen 2000, 178; Mell 2010, 113–56, 163–88.
112 For example, on the bottom register of the front of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, c. 359: Bovini and Brandenburg 1967, 279–83, no. 680, Taf. 104. Another example is the scene of Christ between Adam and Eve on the upper register of the front of the so-called Dogmatic Sarcophagus (now Vatican Museums no. 104), dated to c. 325–350: Bovini and Brandenburg 1967, 39–41, no. 43, Taf. 14. On depictions of Adam and Eve on sarcophagi generally, Koch 2000, 135–7.
113 For example, a fourth-century painting on an *arcosolium* in the Catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter in Rome: Deckers, Seeliger, and Mietke 1987, 265–6, no. 44, Taf. 29c.
114 E.g. Meyer 2009, on the typological significance of Adam and Eve.

115 Weiss 1996, 30–1, 2005, 141–53, 199–219 (on the inscriptions); Hachlili 2009, 64. Interestingly, the scenes below, of Abraham and Isaac and the visit of the angels to Abraham and Sarah, are paired instead with Greek inscriptions asking that donors be remembered.
116 E.g. Hachlili 2009, 64.
117 Sukenik 1932, 40; Hachlili 1998, 288–92; Millar 2008a, 247–8; Hachlili 2009, 57–9 and fig. IV – 1, b, 64.
118 On the mosaics of the synagogue, Sukenik 1932, 21–46; Fine 2005a, 194. On the mosaicists of Beth Alpha (two of whose names survive in the inscriptions, Marianos and his son Hanina), usually regarded as local artists (i.e. less skilled than those of a metropolitan workshop), if innovative ones, see Roth-Gerson 1987, 29–30; Fine 2005a, 102; Hachlili 2009, 250.
119 Here, Gregory is responding to painted versions of the episode that he has "seen often": Gregory of Nyssa, *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti, PG* 46, 572C; trans. Mango 1972, 34.
120 On the Huqoq pavement, Magness et al. 2016; also the recent publication of the "elephant" panel, Britt and Boustan 2017.
121 Leibner and Miller 2010, 249–57.
122 The bibliography on the mosaics is extensive; the most significant works include Budde 1960, 1969, vol. 1, 57–76; Kitzinger 1973; Avi-Yonah 1981, 186–90; Hill 1996, 235–6; Hachlili 1998, 51–2, 209–16, 256–62; Levine 2008, 231; also discussed by Arnulf 1997, 318–20; Agosti 2011–12. The building also includes a mosaic that depicts Noah's Ark with animals streaming out of it.
123 The excavator, Ludwig Budde, dates the mosaics stylistically to the end of the fourth or early fifth century, though he never published a final report on the building: Budde 1969, vol. 1, 31–6. Kitzinger 1973, 137–8, and Avi-Yonah 1981, 188–9, both date them to the second half of the fifth century based upon similarities to the mosaics of the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem. Hachlili 1998, 214–16, 2009, 67, date them more generally to the fifth century. Buschhausen 1972 dates the building to the sixth century, based on the style of the mosaic of Noah, which Kitzinger and others argue is unlikely.
124 Budde 1969, vol. 1, 31–6, argues that the building is a martyrium, as did Kitzinger 1973, 133–44. Avi-Yonah 1981, 189–90; Hachlili 1998, 214–16, 2009, 67, argue for its identity as a synagogue. The arguments cited by Avi-Yonah will not be rehearsed or refuted in full here, but are mostly negative, i.e. no specifically Christian symbols were found (besides, of course, a bronze cross). Hill 1996, 36, finds that the plan of the building is similar to the plans of churches in the region. The picture continues to be murky, but more evidence seems to point to the building's use as a church.
125 Budde 1969, vol. 1, 57–76, and Avi-Yonah 1981, 187–8, argue for nine; Kitzinger 1973, 138–41, identifies eleven.
126 Kitzinger 1973, 138–41.
127 Kitzinger 1973, 138–42; also Thümmel 1974; Stichel 1978, who points out that the quotations from the Septuagint contain some elements from the midrashic tradition.
128 For example, the division between Budde 1969, vol. 1, 37, inscriptions no. 3 and 4. On the lack of borders between scenes, Kitzinger 1973, 141, who uses the format of the mosaics to argue for its relationship to a lost late antique tradition of illustrated rolls (*rotuli*).
129 Kitzinger 1973, 141–3, also attempts to use the continuous narrative of the Mopsuestia mosaic to establish the existence of the late antique *rotulus*, the most famous Byzantine example being the Joshua Roll, with biblical scenes and the relevant texts inscribed underneath: Weitzman 1947; Weitzmann 1952–1953, reprinted and trans. as Weitzmann 1971; also Kiilerich 2011, 59–61.
130 Kiilerich 2011, 60–1.
131 On this visual technique, see Chapter 2.

132 Kitzinger 1973, 133–41, notes some interesting features of the inscriptions, including at least one divergence from the standard Septuagint version of the story.
133 On the ancient (and subsequent) reception of the Samson story, Eynikel and Nicklas 2014.
134 Vriezen 1998, 254–6; Hachlili 2009, 88–90.
135 Russell 1987, 70–4, no. 14, who points out that the inscription rearranges the clauses of the Septuagint version of Isaiah; Campbell 1998, 46–7, fig. 48, pls. 206–8; Tülek 2004, 222–3; *SEG* 37–1278.
136 On the motif of facing animals, a very popular one in classical and late antiquity, Vriezen 1998, 255–7; Hachlili 2009, 199–208.
137 Gough 1974, 416–7; Tülek 2004, 119.
138 Herzfeld and Guyer 1930, 106–7; Foss 1977; Tülek 2004, 307–8; Hachlili 2009, 89–90, who summarizes previous discussions. The mosaic has been dated alternatively to the mid-fifth century (Herzfeld and Guyer) and the seventh century, although the former date is probably to be preferred.
139 Gough 1974, 418–19; Hachlili 2009, 89; the inscription is *SEG* 37–1311. This pavement has been excavated more fully since its original publication, and the entire three-register panel of animals is now visible, along with a dedicatory inscription below, framed by a *tabula ansata*.
140 On these, Hachlili 2009, 155–69.
141 Moracchini-Mazel 1967, 21–30; Pergola 1984; Hachlili 2009, 90.
142 De Vaux 1938, 238–40; *I.Jordanie* no. 159; Piccirillo 1989a, 231, 1993, 201.
143 Talgam 1987; Ilan 1989, 33–4; Mucznik, Ovadiah, and de Silva 1996; Hachlili 2009, 88, with further bibliography.
144 On wishes for peace more generally in churches and synagogues, see the discussion in the next chapter.
145 Gough 1974, 419, who points to the *Henotikon* of the emperor Zeno, issued in 482, as a similar wish expressed in politico-religious terms. Hachlili 2009, 90, summarizes these arguments.
146 Campbell 1994, 129–33; Vriezen 1998, 255–6.
147 For further examples, Hachlili 2009, 204–5. The issue of texts that particularize, and biblicize, otherwise "open" images is taken up by Maguire 1987a, 9–10, who considers a mosaic from the fourth-century basilica at Chrysopolitissa (Kato Paphos) in which a vase (*kantharos*) with vines emerging from it, an image that could be associated with Dionysus, is combined with a biblical quotation that explicitly Christianizes it, associating it with the words spoken by Christ: "I am the true vine" (John 15:1).
148 A similar issue occurs with images of Psalm 41 (42):1 ("As the hart pants for flowing streams . . ."), as mosaics of deer flanking a fountain are common in late antique churches but are only rarely paired with the actual text of the psalm. One rare example of an inscribed version decorates the fifth-century pavement of rectangular hall D at Salona: *CIL* 3, 2673 and 8654; Caillet et al. 2010, vol. 1, 241–3, no. 64, with previous bibliography.
149 An extended account of these is Leatherbury 2016b.
150 Saller and Bagatti 1949, 105; *I.Jordanie* no. 97; Piccirillo 1989a, 187, 1993, 164; Di Segni 1998, 442–3, no. 42.
151 The psalm was part of the Liturgy of the Faithful, the latter part of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, and the last line of the psalm was repeated three times by the officiating priest after he had placed the offerings of the Eucharist on the altar: Saller 1941, 254–5; Branham 1992, 381–2. On the secondary preface attributing the psalm to David, Menn 2004, 64.
152 Saller 1941, 255–8, pl. 116,3; *I.Jordanie* no. 78; Piccirillo 1989a, 165, 1993, 151; Di Segni 1998, 433–4, no. 14; Branham 1992, 381–2, 2012, 209–14.
153 The inscription is *I.Jordanie* no. 159; on the mosaic, Piccirillo 1989a, 231, 1993, 201. On iconoclasm in eighth-century Arabia and Palestine, see *supra* n. 2.

154 For a discussion of these kind of "text-bearing" portraits between classical and Christian traditions, Boeder 1996. On the use of pseudo-text in Byzantium, Walker 2008, 2015. On the portraits of prophets in the synagogue at Dura Europos, one of whom holds a scroll with pseudo-text, Kessler 1987.

155 On "author" portraits from the late antique and Byzantine periods, Krause 2011.

156 Dunbabin 1978, 131, 242; Krause 2011, 58–61.

157 *Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso, quidve (dolens)*: Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.8–9; trans. Fairclough and Gould 1999, 263.

158 On later Christian versions of divinely inspired authors, Krause 2011.

159 The program is preserved in a seventeenth-century painting by Augusto Mariotti, Vatican, BAV, Cod. Barb. lat. 2733, 158–9; printed as a diagram in Ciampini 1693, vol. 3, pl. XIII; reproduced in Ihm 1960, 22–4; Ruysschaert 1967–8; Kessler 2002, 2–3, originally printed as Kessler 1999.

160 This is the description of the practice in Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata* 11.1; also Amato and Schamp 2005; on the gender dynamics of "casting" male readers in female speaking roles in *ethopoeia*, Kraus 2007. On the "casting" strategies in late antique hymns, which often ask readers or listeners to imagine themselves to be minor characters (rather than major ones such as Peter or Paul), Krueger 2015, 111, 118. On *ethopoeia* in the later Byzantine period, Drpić 2016a, 89–92.

161 Photius, *Homily* 10.6, trans. Mango 1958, 188. On scrolls as speech, Nelson 2007, 108–9. On the prophets on the tympanum of Hagia Sophia, including Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, Mango 1962, 60; Mango and Hawkins 1972; Teteriatnikov 2004–2005. The decorative program of the church of the Virgin of Pharos, probably built under the patronage of emperor Michael III around the year 864, also featured similar mosaics, though it is known only through the description of Photius, *Homily* 10, trans. Mango 1958, 184–92, especially 188; see Jenkins and Mango 1956; James 2003b, 62–5. On depictions of prophets holding scrolls more generally, and their connection to contemporary Byzantine liturgical practice, Gerstel 1994. A late antique parallel for this kind of pairing occurs in the sixth-century Rossano Gospels, in which prophets are depicted holding long scrolls associated with scenes from the life of Christ, presenting Christ's deeds as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy: Cavallo, Gribomont, and Loerke 1987; Sevrugian 1990, 40–84; Zimmermann 1998.

162 Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 35–41. Some scholars argue the original inscription read "The Lord gives the law" (*Dominus legem dat*), although there is no evidence for this in the mosaic: Hellemo 1989, 65–89. A fourth-century vault mosaic in the Baptistery of San Giovanni in Fonte in Naples includes Christ holding a scroll inscribed *Dominus legem dat*: Maier 1964, 108–19, pl. 8. A similar inscription is preserved in Christ's codex in the apse mosaic of Santa Pudenziana in Rome (c. 402–17), which reads "The Lord, *conservator* of the church of Pudentiana" (*Dominus conservator ecclesiae Pudentianae*): Ihm 1960, 130–2; Oakeshott 1967, 65–7; Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 55–76; Dassman 1970; Feld 1992. Hellemo 1989, 39–46, reads the Pudenziana text as an acclamation. The text of the mosaic was the subject of restoration in the Renaissance and originally included the word "Saint" (*Sanctae*) before "Pudenziana" (*Pudentianae*): Schlatter 1989, 156.

163 However, Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 37, makes the point that restorations are to blame for the interpretation of the scene as a *traditio legis* rather than as what he defines as a *largitio pacis*, based upon imperial iconography. On the *traditio legis*, see *supra* n. 79.

164 Rasch and Arbeiter 2007; Johnson 2009, 139–55, with further bibliography.

165 Cooley 2012, 62–6, with further bibliography.

166 On Damasus, including his conflict with Ursinus, see Chapter 6.

167 On the mosaics, Woodruff 1931.

168 Nasrallah 2010 argues convincingly for an interpretation of the program that does not privilege text over image, but instead uses the mosaics as evidence for the acceptance of or debate about certain texts, especially the Book of Revelation. For a different

reading which emphasizes the private, personal meaning of the inscriptions in the prophet's book and below the image, James 2011b, 264–6.

169 On the inscription, Ihm 1960, 182–4; Feissel 1983, 97–9; Spieser 2001a, 6; Nasrallah 2010.

170 Interestingly, the codex is inscribed with a repeat of the first line of the dedicatory inscription that runs underneath the image.

171 Feissel 1983, 97; trans. Nasrallah 2010, 375–7, slightly adapted; for a variant translation, James 2011b, 257.

172 Nasrallah 2010, 376.

173 Weitzmann 1947, 1955, 1977; Hurtado 2006, 43–94; Stroumsa 2016.

174 Closed codices could also be labeled with the names of their authors, as are the Four Gospels in the open cabinet in the mosaics of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, probably originally a chapel dedicated to St. Lawrence (in the mosaic): Deichmann 1974, 75–9; Grig 2004, 136–41; Deliyannis 2010, 74–84; Dresken-Weiland 2016, 36–8. Mackie 1990 instead identifies the saint in the mosaic as St. Vincent based upon the similarity of the scene to the text of a poem by Prudentius.

175 Taft 1975, 40–1, n. 99; Nelson 2007, 108. The mosaicists who decorated the churches of Ravenna had a special interest in both the variety of jeweled decoration and the particular details of bindings, including closures and ribbon markers.

176 Deckers, Seeliger, and Mietke 1994, 199–201, no. 3, Taf. 1; Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni 2002, 129, 131 fig. 144.

177 *CIL* 11, 1, 260; preserved in Andreas Agnellus, *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis* 50, ed. Deliyannis 2006, 214–15; also Mackie 2003, 104–15; Ivanovici 2016.

178 This phrase was also used as an anti-Arian slogan: Deichmann 1976, 203; Miller 2000, 219 n. 13.

179 Although the mosaic has been restored in the last several centuries, the inscribed text is recorded in pre-restoration drawings: Terry and Maguire 2007, vol. 1, 176–8.

180 Nelson 2007, 108–9.

181 Deichmann 1974, 108–24; Deliyannis 2010, 68–70, 329 n. 160, who points out that the text is from the *Biblia Itala* rather than the Vulgate Bible.

182 Deichmann 1976, 38–9; Effenberger 1975, 29–40; Deliyannis 2010, 250–4, who links the mosaic to the plague of 543.

183 Andreescu-Treadgold 1990, 13–57, 2007; Deliyannis 2010, 252–3. These texts are polemical and do fit the anti-Arian (and anti-Ostrogothic) climate in the city after it was reconquered by the Byzantines under Belisarius in 540: Effenberger 1975, 43–8; Sörries 1983, 226–43.

184 Effenberger 1975, 43–8.

185 Effenberger 1975, 60–4; Sörries 1983, 254.

186 Ihm 1960, 190–1.

187 Ihm 1960, 198–204; Van Moorsel 1978. The same passage is inscribed on the standards held by the sixth-century mosaics of the archangels Michael and Gabriel on the lower zone of the triumphal arch of Sant'Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna, restored in 1906–1907: Deichmann 1976, 245, 262–4; Deliyannis 2010, 266–7, 270; Abramowski 2001; Dresken-Weiland 2016, 278–80. The same text was inscribed around the mandorla of Christ in the apse of the Pantokrator Church at Herakleia near Latmos: Ihm 1960, 190–1.

188 Taft 1975, 225–7; Daly 2009, 76–7. The first part of the Trisagion also appears inscribed on Byzantine works of art, including a sixth-century processional cross from Syria, part of the Antioch Treasure, now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, acc. no. 50.5.3: Downey 1954; Mundell Mango 1986, 192–7, cat. 42a – c.

189 The image of the four creatures is based on the six-winged seraphim of Isaiah, as well as the four living creatures of the vision of Ezekiel 1:5–14.

190 The Trisagion was often inscribed in both apotropaic and funerary contexts: Prentice 1902; Day 1999, 248–51.

191 On the mosaics, Baldass 1957; Ihm 1960, 138–40; Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 149–68; Oakeshott 1967, 145–6.

192 "Passio Polychronii," *Passio Sancti Laurentii,* ed. Delehaye 1933. Grig 2004, 138–41, points out that Prudentius also focuses on this part of the saint's *passio*: *Crowns of the Martyrs* 93–108, 125–33, 139–40; also see Conybeare 2002, on the numerous verse versions of St Lawrence's life.

193 On light as a trope in inscriptions, see Chapter 2.

194 Oakeshott 1967, 145, misreads this text as a reference to Acts 7:59, *A de [SC. ad Deum?] sit anima mea*.

195 Stephen's vision of God and Christ as described in Acts 7:54–6 is nevertheless interesting, however, particularly as it interacts with the *maiestas domini* composition of the central tableau of the San Lorenzo mosaic.

196 Hesbert 1963–1979, vol. 3, nos. 1271–2; Jeffrey 2003, especially n. 116, who cites the writings of Arnobius the Younger.

6 Embedded prayers

Returning to the town of Madaba in modern-day Jordan, the site of the "Madaba Map" explored in the previous chapter, we encounter a series of late antique churches famous for their mosaic pavements. These floors, all apparently executed by a workshop based in the town itself, date from the sixth to the eighth century, and preserve a broad range of decorative schemes.[1] After a short walk from the church of the Map, a visitor may enter a small church renovated at the end of this date range, the Church of the Virgin. As part of the renovation of the building in the year 767, the central section of the unusually shaped round nave of the church received a new pavement,[2] replacing an earlier late sixth- or early seventh-century floor, which itself had replaced an early sixth-century mosaic depicting the tragic myth of Hippolytus, son of Theseus, and his stepmother Phaedra at the site, which was probably from a mansion in the center of town.[3] While we do not know what kind of image – geometric or figural – adorned the earlier pavement of the church, the eighth-century floor is a marvel of geometric patterns and vegetal forms **(Color Plate 30)**. In the center of the nave, a square panel with a complicated interlace border frames a circle, its border made up of no less than three separate patterns: a solid yellow band, a yellow and gray guilloche band, and a larger series of interlocking circles, the spaces between which are filled with small red flowers and yellow-and-white diamonds, forms that also appear between the outermost circle and its square interlace frame.

When the visitor's eyes penetrate the complicated circular frame, they encounter more "filler" devices, including wide ivy leaves, open flowers depicted as if viewed from above, and knots, before reaching another sequence of interconnected frames, including an eight-pointed star formed by red, yellow, and gray lines of interlace, and a second yellow and gray guilloche circle, echoing the outer border of the circular frame. We have seen relatives of these forms previously in Chapter 3, which were likely chosen for reasons beyond their value as decoration. Designed to act as protective forms to shield the interior from evil forces, the concentric circles, guilloches, and eight-pointed star create a kaleidoscopic effect of whirring motion, enlivening and guarding the space.[4]

Inside the innermost protective frame, a ten-line inscription in Greek is placed at the center (Figure 6.1). Written in hexameter verse, the text presents a

Figure 6.1 Detail, inscription at the center of the circular nave, Church of the Virgin, Madaba

Source: Photograph by author

striking declaration of faith that explicitly connects the act of looking with that of praying:

Παρθενι-
κὴν Μαρίην Θεο-
μήτορα καὶ ὃν ἔτικ-
τεν Χ(ριστὸ)ν παμβασιλῆα Θε-
οῦ μόνον υἱέα μούνου
δερκόμενος καθάρευ-
ε νόον καὶ σάρκα καὶ ἔ-
ργα ὡς καθαραῖς
εὐχαῖς αὐτὸν
Θ(εὸ)ν (ἵ)λαον <εὕρῃς>.

> Behold [the image of] the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and whom she bore, Christ, ruler of all, the only son of the only God, and cleanse your mind and flesh and deeds. May you find gracious God himself through cleansing prayers.[5]

Strikingly, the text appears to refer to an image of the Virgin in the church, asking readers to "behold" it (δερκόμενος). The inscription does not specify the medium or location of the image, though it was presumably not located on the floor. Those

inside the church would not have needed this information, as they would easily have been able to discern the image of which the text speaks: perhaps an icon of the Virgin and Child painted onto a wooden panel and displayed in the church, or a mosaic in the apse, potentially an image similar to the mosaic of the Virgin and Child in the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, reerected by Patriarch Photios in 867 after the end of Iconoclasm (Figure 6.2).[6] As encountered in Hagia Sophia today, this latter image looms over the viewer standing in the church

Figure 6.2 Virgin and Child, apse mosaic of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, c. 867

Source: Photograph by author

interior, appearing to hover in space, projected forward by its gold ground.[7] Reinstalled after the fierce debates over the role of sacred images, the mosaic testifies to the power of Christian devotion through vision: the faithful channel their prayers through the image to the prototype, the Virgin, who was considered a powerful intercessory figure, speaking to Christ on their behalf.[8]

Our knowledge of the specific Marian image in the Madaba church must remain incomplete, but the prominence of the inscription suggests that it was a key component of the decorative program of the church. The text does not describe the particulars of the image, as did a number of the inscribed *tituli* from the previous chapter, but emphasizes the power of restorative prayer mediated by an image: "behold" (δερκόμενος) the image, and "cleanse your mind and flesh and deeds" (καθάρευε νόον καὶ σάρκα καὶ ἔργα), such that you "find God . . . through cleansing prayers" (. . . ὡς καθαρᾶις εὐχαῖς). By doubling down on the cleansing power of prayers made through the image, the text not only adopts an iconophile position during a time when the debate over sacred images was still raging – a choice that makes sense given the Abbasid (Islamic) context in which it was produced – but also echoes the language of ritual purity and salvation adopted by Greek, Roman, and late antique authors. The emphasis on the sacred building as a place of purity was not new in the early Christian period: witness the famous inscription over the entrance to the sanctuary of Asklepios, the doctor-god, at Epidaurus in Greece, which encouraged visitors to place themselves in a pure mental state before entering the building: "Pure must be he who enters the fragrant temple; purity means to think nothing but holy thoughts."[9] Earlier Christian entrance inscriptions echoed this same focus on purity, including the Latin text that the bishop Paulinus commissioned to go over the main entrance into his new church at Nola: "Let there be peace for you, whoever pure with a pure heart enters the sanctuary of Christ God."[10] Clerics preached of the same kind of spiritual preparation, which also had a physical dimension: as Caesarius of Arles advised his congregants in the sixth century: "If it is wicked and disgraceful to approach the altar with dirty hands, how much worse is it to receive the body and blood of Christ into a soiled soul?"[11]

At Madaba, in its eighth-century Christian context, the text encourages a similar kind of purity of mind as does the much earlier inscription from Epidaurus, but adopts the Nola inscription's emphasis on the church as a place that supports the believer's efforts at "cleansing prayers" that can lead them to God. The language of the Madaba inscription in fact derives even more directly from the writings of the influential fourth-century theologian Gregory of Nazianzus, who described the proper route of salvation for the "man of God," who must be "cleansed in mind and flesh" (νόον καὶ σάρκα καθήρας).[12] Rather than solely advising that visitors purify their minds before entering the church space, however, the Madaba text instead emphasizes the role of sight, asking them to cleanse themselves in mind, flesh, and deeds (an addition to Gregory's formulation) by interacting with an image.

The classical language of sight and seeing, present in the middle of the text in the verb δέρκομαι (given in its participle form, δερκόμενος), implies not only sight but sharp sight or perception.[13] Strikingly, the same verb appears in several late antique epigrams preserved in the *Greek Anthology*, suggesting an interest in

contemplating the nature of the sense of sight in the period.[14] In a poem on the famous bronze cow of the sculptor Myron, ascribed to Julian, prefect of Egypt, through seeing (δερκομένοις) the sculpture appears to be alive, but through touching (ἐφαπτομένοις) reveals itself to be a work of art.[15] In this poem, the poet engages with the popular classical trope of art versus nature: sight may be sharp, but skilled artists can confuse this sense, forcing the viewer to engage with the object physically in order to discern whether it is truly alive or merely seems to be.[16] A late antique epigram from a cycle of poems that were apparently inscribed upon the earlier Hellenistic Homeric reliefs placed on the columns of the temple of Queen Apollonis at Cyzicus in Anatolia, in modern Turkey, uses the same word to describe Odysseus seeing (δερκόμενος) the ghost of his mother, Antikleia, during his visit to the underworld.[17] It is difficult to imagine what this scene looked like, as we have no surviving images of this encounter from the period, but what is significant is that the word for sharp sight or perception can double in the text for what the viewer of the relief sees at Cyzicus: (s)he perceives Odysseus perceiving his mother's ghost. Indeed, in a sixth-century epigram attributed to Paul the Silentiary, the same word is used to describe what the viewer sees (and what readers imagine themselves seeing), namely the tomb of Homer on the Aegean island of Ios: "Wonder not, O stranger, as you look [δερκόμενος], if so little an island can contain so great a man [Homer]."[18] Although they come from a series of different contexts, this cluster of poems, composed slightly earlier than the Madaba inscription, reveals a late antique interest in perception through sight.[19] But at Madaba, the sense of sight is not denigrated in favor of touch, as in the Myron's cow epigram; rather, it is elevated as the sense through which the faithful can best communicate their prayers to the Virgin and Christ, and thereby cleanse themselves.

The inscription was installed in the Madaba church as part of a renovation dated to 767, when the region was under Abbasid control, and at the beginnings of debates over the status of images in the region (the so-called "Syro-Palestinian iconoclasm") and in Byzantium more broadly.[20] The Madaba inscription, in fact, appears to respond to Muslim claims about the identity of Christ, labeling him the "only son of the only God" (μόνον . . . μούνου), suggesting some level of contact between Christians and Muslims in the region.[21] However, the link between sight (through prayer) and salvation was not a new one in the eighth century. At a sixth-century church at al-Rashidiyah, also in modern-day Jordan, a woman, Megale, commissioned an inscription in the central nave pavement:

Ἐνταῦθα εἰ-
σελθὼν κατανοή-
σις μητέρα παρθένον,
Χ(ριστο)ῦ ἄφραστον λόγον, Θ(εο)ῦ
οἰκονομίαν καί, εἰ πιστεύ-
σῃς, σωθήσει·

> Having entered into this place you will see the Virgin Mother of Christ, the ineffable *Logos*, dispensation of God, and if you were faithful you will be saved.[22]

Megale assures her own salvation through her commission, and declares as much in the remainder of the inscription ("completed . . . for her salvation"). The text does more than advertise a Marian image: it anticipates what "you," the viewer, "will see" (κατανοήσ[ε]ις), (the image of) the Virgin, and promotes her role as intercessor through whom the faithful can attain salvation (εἰ πιστεύσης σωθήσει). The verb in the inscription, a form of νοέω, can imply a kind of mental or spiritual sight, which may suggest that the reader is encouraged to envision the Virgin in his or her mind, or, perhaps, to contemplate deeply the physical image with which they are confronted.[23] The inscription seems to promote a specific path to salvation through vision: if a faithful Christian enters the church, gazes at the image, and contemplates it, presumably through prayer, they will be granted salvation.[24]

This chapter engages the links forged between patrons, viewers, sacred buildings, and the divine. Considering inscribed texts as well as images that preserve the named and anonymous prayers of congregants, it wrestles with the function of embedded or materialized prayers. While some late antique authors argued that "pure" prayers were meant to be ephemeral speech acts, a kind of private compact with the divine, many individuals turned their prayers into material texts in buildings (as well as on portable objects) to be performed and re-performed by readers on behalf of donors. First, we consider contemporary debates about how people prayed in the period, and what prayer meant to individuals, communities, and institutions, considering especially the case of prayer "graffiti." Second, we examine prayers that encouraged motion around the interior of the sacred space, drawing on components of ekphrasis (the art of vivid description, as examined in Chapter 4) to ask viewers to re-perform prayers for donors as they moved around the space. Third, this chapter reflects upon some of the motives for prayer, as well as the personal or communal modes encouraged by inscribed prayers. Next, we turn to the language of place and placing as it is used in these inscriptions, especially markers such as "here" or "there," which root the material prayer in space, emphasizing the placedness of otherwise ephemeral prayers. We then investigate texts that use prayers with biblical, often Old Testament, precedents to designate particular parts of the church building as sacred, driving readers to perceive liminal spaces such as entrance portals and triumphal arches as sites between secular and sacred time, transforming the character of sacred buildings. Finally, the chapter briefly considers a small group of inscriptions that draw attention to the act of writing and, by extension, reading, shining light onto the power of inscriptions to connect individuals to the divine. By looking at the unique character of prayers physically embedded in their buildings, as well as the play between prayers inscribed in different mediums and contexts, this chapter aims to construct a deeper understanding of the experience of popular prayer in late antiquity, focused on the experiences of clergy and congregants in the cities and villages of the empire.

Prayer in the late antique world

The concept of prayer may on its surface seem to be a relatively consistent one across religions, a set of words and actions intended to connect an individual or a

group of people to a divine figure – a deity, or a holy figure such as a saint.[25] However, in late antiquity, prayer was conceived of differently within pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. In the traditions of Graeco-Roman paganism or polytheism, prayer (προσευχή), especially petitionary prayer associated with a vow (εὐχή), was a central component of worship, second only to sacrifice as a way of establishing a reciprocal dialogue with the gods.[26] Judaism also gave pride of place to sacrifice, until the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Roman armies in 70 CE, an act that set in motion titanic changes in the religion, leading to the popularization of prayer as a form of worship in the synagogue.[27] Around the same time that Jews were embracing prayer in place of sacrifice, pagans and Christians were engaged in a lively debate about the forms and functions of prayer, a debate that in the Christian case resulted in the enshrinement of prayer as a central form of worship.[28] Even between Christian communities, there were disagreements over the nature of prayer, including the part of one's self that prays (the mind or the spirit),[29] as well as the words most appropriate for prayer,[30] and whether one needed to speak the prayer aloud for it to be successful.[31] Prayer was also a significant feature of worship in early Islam, involving the act of repeated prayer (which itself involved purification, bodily prostration, and recitation of God's word) at fixed times throughout the day (*salat*) as well as individual supplication at other chosen times (*du'a*).[32]

The philosophical debates about Christian, Jewish, and Muslim prayer in the period are rich, but it remains difficult to determine how influential they were on popular traditions of prayer. As one might expect, Christian clerics, monks, and other ascetics seem to have been more strongly influenced by emerging theories of prayer.[33] In the lives of the majority of lay Christians, and many Jews as well, prayer still appears to have been conceived as a basic "conversation [ὁμιλία] with God," as Clement of Alexandria put it in the late second century CE,[34] an understanding that would not have been out of place in earlier Roman times. Christians would have been accustomed to praying in two different contexts – communally, during their participation in the liturgy, and individually – and both of these are significant as we turn to the issue of "embedded" prayers, or prayers made material through their inscription in churches, as well as in synagogues and mosques, though we will be primarily concerned with the prayers of individuals, sometimes referred to as "personal prayer".[35] In this case, the personal was also the public, as inscribed prayers, even anonymous ones, were intended to be seen and to encourage interactions from the community.[36] Importantly, the inscribed words of the prayers under consideration here are "at one remove from an actual prayer in thought and speech."[37] However, these inscriptions did not mark the conclusion of a prayer, but rather its extension, keeping at least a portion of the prayer alive to be re-performed by later audiences.[38]

Perhaps the most personal of all extant embedded prayers are prayer graffiti, texts, and symbols (a cross, a menorah) scratched or painted onto the walls or floors of sacred buildings. While I use the term "graffiti" here, it is important to remember that the term historically has been associated with a negative, destructive type of activity in public space, the writing, drawing, or painting of texts

or images whose production is unauthorized or illicit in some way (against city codes, perhaps, or at least norms). As has been emphasized recently, however, these associations did not operate in antiquity, and public buildings, especially sacred ones, seem to have invited and even welcomed visitors to interact with their surfaces in more or less extemporaneous ways.[39] Recent discussions of graffiti have illuminated the verbal and material powers of these texts (or images) to include the reader in a wider conversation with others as well as the building,[40] to evoke the presence of holy figures and their devotees, and to create a space where devotees could join the community by leaving behind their mark as part of a group of marks.[41] The practice of incising or painting one's prayer at a temple was widespread in the ancient world, perhaps most memorably at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in Greece, where hundreds of inscriptions, some more professionally produced than others, speak to the importance of the shrine from the fifth century BCE to the Roman period.[42] In late antiquity, prayer graffiti left behind by Christian, Jewish, or Muslim visitors at temples could act to redefine the character of the previously pagan space, converting it for its new users.[43] By carving a text or a cross on a wall of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, or by inscribing a ship or a menorah onto a wall of one of the Jewish tombs at the site of Beth Shearim in Israel, individuals could interact with the sacred space, joining the community, shaping the nature of the space over time, and in the process inviting future readers to participate in conversations between the faithful, God or saint, and the building itself.[44] Just as texts could move between the realms of the verbal and the visual, a cross or a menorah could act as part of a prayer, making permanent the otherwise ephemeral verbal act of praying.

All prayer graffiti reveal seemingly individual acts of prayer. However, although some graffiti reveal persons striving to stand out from the crowd by writing their prayers in larger scripts than others, or by the use of specific types of meaningful frames (see Chapter 3), the majority in fact suggest that the act of embedding one's prayer in the surface of a cult building was closely related to the desire to mark one's place in the community.[45] At certain sites, this community was a diverse one formed over centuries: for example, at the Cave of Elijah on Mount Carmel, near the modern city of Haifa and one of several sites associated with the prophet, hundreds of inscriptions adorn the walls, marking and memorializing the devotional activities of visitors (Figure 6.3).[46] On the west and east walls of the cave, over two hundred inscriptions, the majority of which are in Greek (with some in Hebrew, and less than a handful in Latin and Arabic), ask that those named "be remembered": on the west wall, for instance, a text framed in a *tabula ansata* (a frame discussed in Chapter 3), reads, "May Germanos the solider and his children and his wife Sosipatra be remembered."[47] While inscriptions like that of Germanos and Sosipatra were previously dated to the late antique period, recent work has suggested that the majority of extant texts in the cave were carved in the first through third centuries CE by visitors who came to worship a local incarnation of the Semitic god Baʿal, though Jews and Christians did visit the cave as well, leaving behind their names and sacred symbols, the menorah and the cross.[48] Although the collected prayers at a site with a pan-religious appeal like Elijah's Cave, or at

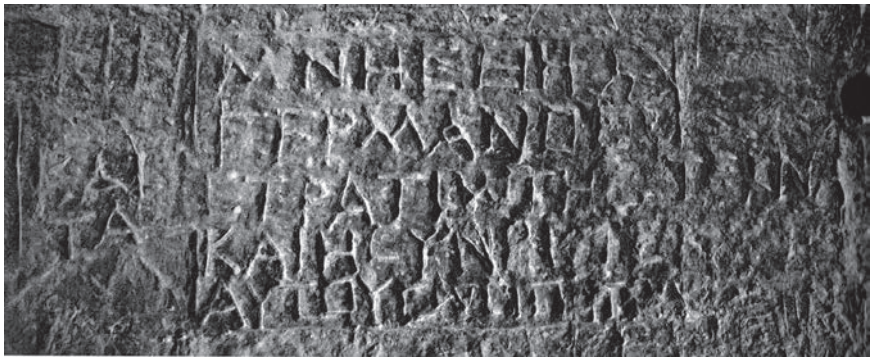

Figure 6.3 Graffito of Germanos and Sosipatra, Cave of Elijah, Mount Carmel, Israel, second or third century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Asher Ovadiah

the Memoria Apostolorum in Rome, an early Christian shrine to the apostles Peter and Paul, are "a discernable record of multitudes of individual physical gestures of piety," and thus each speaks in his or her own voice, their similar, often simple, formulae and visual format, as well as their accumulation at important, liminal, spaces ("hotspots") within the church or synagogue, testify to their orientation towards the community and towards audiences both divine and human.[49] Most importantly, these graffiti demonstrate devotees engaging with the buildings in which they prayed, turning the church, synagogue, or mosque into a living site of contact with the community and the divine.

Some prayer graffiti even engage with the images that decorate these buildings. In the large corpus of graffiti from Dura Europos in Syria, a small group of painted and incised inscriptions from the famous third-century synagogue appear to record the responses of Persian visitors to the paintings.[50] Written in Middle Persian in the years before the city was destroyed by the Persian armies, the greater number of the texts are records of Persians who "looked and beheld" the paintings of Elijah reviving the widow's child (1 Kings 17–24) and the triumph of Mordechai over the wicked official Haman (Esther 6), on the lower west wall of the synagogue, to the left of the Torah niche (Figure 6.4).[51] Others describe the Persians' "appreciation" of the images,[52] or enumerate the action taking place in the Elijah scene, including a painted text on Elijah's foot: "when Hormezd the scribe came and he looked at this [picture]: 'Living the child (?) (who had been) dead'."[53] Two texts seem to indicate a devotional response: one of these, another text on the Elijah painting, scratched in Parthian immediately above the right thigh of the prophet, acclaims the life-giving act performed by Elijah: "Praise to the gods, praise; since life, life eternally has been given."[54] This text in fact anticipates a response from a reader, who, if (s)he follows the graffito's suggestion, will offer up praise to the gods. Unfortunately, outside of the sacred buildings of Dura Europos itself, we

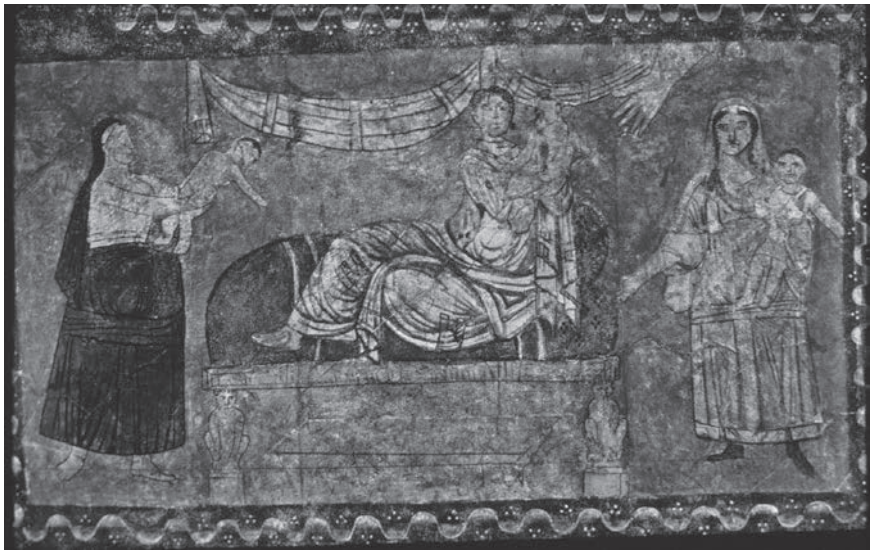

Figure 6.4 Elijah revives the widow's child, fresco from the west wall, synagogue at Dura Europos, Syria, c. 239

Source: Art Resource, NY

are missing many Christian analogs to this practice in the period.[55] However, this should perhaps not surprise us too much, as painted plaster and the walls that support it are quite vulnerable to the ravages of time.

At the sites where prayer graffiti survives, the juxtaposition between the dynamic individual and formulaic communal aspects of the inscriptions and their engagement with the fabric of the building itself are not unique to these "spontaneous" texts. As we turn to the pre-planned, licit inscriptions – painted, carved, and mosaic – that embedded prayers into the walls and floors of buildings, we should stay attuned to the similarities and differences between these texts and graffiti. Both types of inscriptions shaped visitors' experiences within a sacred building, but the former were placed with special intent in order to shape the ways that individuals and the community prayed within the space.

Praying in motion

The mosaic text with which we began this chapter, in the Church of the Virgin at Madaba, not only functions as a prayer on behalf of congregants and the clergy, and as a guide to prayer for the same groups, but includes mention of an image of the Virgin within the church. This reference to an image, abbreviated though it may be, necessarily directed the attention of the reader outward, away from the text and towards the image, shaping his or her gaze as well as movement in the

interior. Whether or not visitors to the church noticed the text or the image first is not, in a sense, significant, as the two worked in tandem to create a network of responses, encouraging visitors to interact with the space, bouncing back and forth between text and image, or image and text. Like ekphrastic inscriptions (considered in Chapter 4), inscribed prayers also shaped the physical and mental responses of the faithful through their arrangement and exhortations to pray in certain ways.

Both of these features can be seen in the Greek inscriptions of the pavement of a small sixth-century circular room at Gerasa in modern-day Jordan, connected to the so-called Propylaea Church, built in the gatehouse of the city's grand Temple of Artemis and probably used as a preparatory storage space (*diakonikon*) by the clergy (Figure 6.5).[56] Entering the room from the atrium, the visitor encounters two inscriptions, both of which are oriented towards the east rather than towards the doorway of the room. In the center of the floor, a short text quotes a line from a popular psalm, Psalm 64 (65):5: "Holy is your Temple, marvellous in righteousness."[57] Framed multiply by a small roundel and an intricate eight-point star combined with a pattern of interwoven lines, a version of an apotropaic or protective frame (considered in Chapter 3), the text emphasizes the sacred nature of the

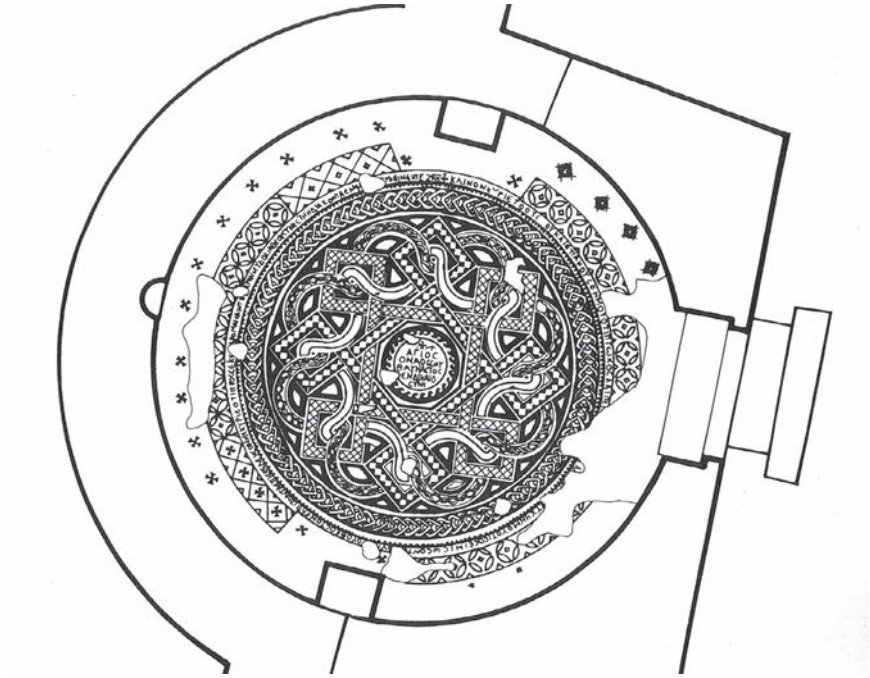

Figure 6.5 Drawing of the mosaic pavement of the *diakonikon*, Propylaea Church, Gerasa, Jordan, sixth century

Source: Courtesy of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, Mount Nebo, and the American Center of Oriental Research, Amman

space, using a traditional term, "temple" (ναός), common in Christian building inscriptions of the period to turn the interior into a space that exists simultaneously in the (biblical) past and the late antique present. Instead of a (pagan) temple, or the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, the church is defined as the space of worship.[58] Perhaps even more strikingly, the text plays on the *topos* of wonder, setting up an implied competition between the physical and spiritual "wondrousness" of the church that was already noted in the fourth century by Augustine: "It [the psalm] did not say, 'Holy is your temple, wonderful in its pillars, wonderful in its marble, wonderful in its golden roofs'; but '*wonderful in righteousness*.'"[59] Although the inscription seems to encourage a turn from externally directed vision to internal contemplation, as does Augustine in his commentary on the same psalm as is quoted in the inscription, it plays on the same palpable tension between the material and immaterial seen already in Chapter 2: the spiritual advice given by the text is surrounded by a floor "wonderful for its [colored] marble."

The second, longer inscription in the circular room also encourages readers to shift their mind to prayer. Arranged in a circle around the edges of the pavement, the text combines the text of another psalm, Psalm 85 (86):1–3, with a standard dedicatory text:

> + Lean, Lord, your ear, and hear me, for I am a beggar and poor. Guard my soul, for it is yours. Save your servant, O God, who hopes in you. Have mercy on me, Lord, for I have called to you the whole day long. + By the good will of God, the *diakonikon* was set up in the month of Artemisios, the thirteenth year of the indiction, the year 627 [565 CE].[60]

Adopting the first-person voice of the psalm, the inscription allows readers to personalize their re-performance of the heartfelt prayer. Its repetitive structure of invocations to God – "lean . . . ," "guard . . . ," "save . . . ," "have mercy . . ." – shapes the performance of the psalm/prayer, breaking up the otherwise continuous text as one reads it aloud, walking around the interior of the small room. Bracketed by crosses, symbols of Christ and the Christian faith but also practical punctuation devices, the prayer is at the same time part of and separate from the dedicatory text, which provides the date of the renovation of the room.[61] Just as the inscription in the center of the room asks viewers to consider the architecture of the building in biblical terms, the layout of the text around the edges encourages a continuous re-performance, linking the past and present: the reader has (in the perfect tense) "called to you [God] the whole day long" (πρός σε κεκράξομαι ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν).

We will return to the fascinating temporal aspects of inscriptions that quote biblical passages, but we must first consider the impact of this circular arrangement on prayers, especially those written onto floors. In the *diakonikon* of the Propylaea Church, the text's circular arrangement relates to its emphasis on the continuous: just as the circular frame of the inscription has neither beginning nor end, the prayers of the truly faithful never cease. The circular arrangement of the text at Gerasa is relatively rare in extant church pavements, though an epigraphic emphasis on circular viewing is common (see Chapter 4); the two other extant

examples of texts inscribed in circles onto floors are both prayers, and both decorate churches at other sites in modern-day Jordan. In the center of the nave of the Church of the Apostles at Madaba, dated to 578/579 by inscription, a clipeate bust of the sea personified (*Thalassa*) is framed by a circular text that preserves prayers for the donors and the (chief?) artist: "Lord God, maker of heaven and earth, give life to Anastasios and Thomas and Theodora and Salamanios, mosaicist" (Figure 6.6).[62] Walking around this central roundel, clergy and the congregation would read and re-perform this prayer for the notables of the community, who may have been a mix of clerics and laypeople;[63] at least one, Salamanios the mosaicist (ψηφοθέτος), was certainly a layman.[64] This prayer is addressed to "Lord God, maker of heaven and earth," a popular epithet that appears in the Nicene Creed as well as a number of psalms, including Psalm 145 (146):6, where God is referred to as "maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them," crediting Him with dominion over the personification of the sea in the center.[65] Arranged in a circle in the center of the nave, a prominent and easily accessible location within the church, the text invites the reader to walk it, repeating a continuous circular prayer for the named donors and mosaicist, a similar kind of activation as we saw in Chapter 4, but this time focused on directed prayer for a series of individuals, rather than aesthetic appreciation.

A similarly arranged, though slightly more formulaic, circular text appears in the center of the nave of the Church of John the Baptist at Khirbat al-Samra, dated

Figure 6.6 Central medallion of *Thalassa* with inscribed prayer around, Church of the Apostles, Madaba, 578/579

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

Figure 6.7 Circular inscription of the archbishop Theodore, mosaic pavement of the central nave, Church of St. John the Baptist, Khirbat al-Samra, Jordan, 638/639

Source: Courtesy of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, Mount Nebo, and the American Center of Oriental Research, Amman

to 638/639, where it is divided into two parts, an inner and an outer circle (Figure 6.7). The central image – another clipeate portrait? – is lost, as are portions of the text, but the meaning can largely be reconstructed:

OUTER CIRCLE: [In the time of] the most holy and most blessed Archbishop Theodore, the holy [place] of the martyr John [was decorated with mosaic?].
INNER CIRCLE: Have mercy, Lord God of St. John. [In the month?] of August . . . of the *deuterarios* (second-in-command).[66]

Just as at Gerasa, the Khirbat al-Samra text is oriented to the east, inviting the reader to start at the top of the outer circle, in an east-west alignment with the entrance and the sanctuary and altar. If we believe the reconstruction proposed by Pierre-Louis Gatier, readers would begin the text inside the inner circle on the other side, walking the second half of the text before picking up the "beginning" invocation to "Lord God of St. John" at the western side (bottom) of the circle.[67] While this may have been the case, the fragmentary nature of the text makes it difficult to determine the precise preferred order in which the text would have

been read. Whichever way they went, walking the circle at least twice to decipher the entire text, readers would convert a simple dedicatory inscription into a prayer for the donors, including the archbishop Theodore, because of their gift of the new mosaics to the church – "Have mercy, Lord God . . ." on "Archbishop Theodore" – and indeed, the mention of the church mosaics and the invocation for mercy are aligned in the northern (left) side of the circular frame, one framing the other. Because of the generic nature of the invocation, however, readers could also insert themselves into the inscribed request for "mercy."

Motives and modes of prayer

These circular texts invite readers to pray for the donors, and sometimes the artists, but others go further in encouraging the reader to engage in particular types of prayer or devotion beyond prayer for more general, if nevertheless important, motives such as salvation.[68] Some inscriptions remind the faithful of the special powers of the church's patron saints. The mosaic dedicatory inscription from the east end of the nave pavement of the Church of Ss. Cosmas and Damian, at Gerasa, dated to 533 by inscription, encourages prayer for the sake of prayer and for the atonement of sins:

> [Τ]ῶν ἀθλοφόρων νῦν τὴν καλὴν ξυνωρίδα
> σέβων προσεύχου. Καὶ γάρ εἰσιν ἅγιοι
> τέχνην ἔχοντες τῶν παθῶν θελκτήριον.
> Ἐντέθευν ἕκαστος πρ[ο]σφέρων ἀγάλλεται
> ταύτῃ καλύπτων τοῦ βίου τὰ πταίσματα.
>
> Now be faithful and worship the beautiful pair of triumphant ones [Cosmas and Damian]. For they are saints, having the art of healing sufferings. Everyone who worships there rejoices in this [art], veiling the sins of life.[69]

Shining forth in white tesserae on a bright red ground, the text exhorts the reader to worship the doctor-saints, praying through an image of them, and prayer is cast as the proper method of overcoming one's sins (τοῦ βίου τὰ πταίσματα). This exhortation uses direct address in order to explain to the reader why and how (s)he might access the spiritual powers of the martyrs, in contrast to the apse inscription in Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome (526–530), which declares that the faithful will be healed physically: "To the people, certain hope of health comes from the medical martyrs."[70] While both inscriptions praise the powers of the same saints, the former invites the reader to directly engage with them as a more effective way of ensuring the desired result.

An even more specific form of veneration is advised by a mosaic inscription on the floor of the narthex of the later sixth-century Church of the Holy Martyrs at Madaba, placed in a medallion immediately in front of the entrance to the nave: "Whoever enters here, may they hold a pure palm branch [βάϊαν ἁγνήν], preserving [the memory] of the most holy martyrs, and giving glory to God as His due"

Figure 6.8 Mosaic inscription, entrance pavement of the Church of the Holy Martyrs, Madaba, later sixth century

Source: Photograph by author

(Figure 6.8).[71] In the *editio princeps* of this inscription, Leah Di Segni expresses confusion about whether the requirement of a palm branch was meant to be taken literally by worshippers.[72] Palm trees were intimately associated with the martyrs, and are often depicted next to or behind them in late antique churches.[73] Palms were also associated with the triumphal entrance of the original Christian martyr, Christ, into Jerusalem on a donkey, during which his followers held out branches in tribute, an event still celebrated in some Christian traditions on Palm Sunday with palm branches or crosses made out of palm leaves.[74] Palm branches were in use in fourth-century processions on Palm Sunday, witnessed by the pilgrim Egeria during her visit to Jerusalem,[75] and donors are depicted holding them in church mosaics elsewhere in the region, including the donor Soreg, who is clad in ecclesiastical costume and appears flanked by two palm trees in miniature in the early sixth-century pavement of the Chapel of Elias, Maria, and Soreg in Gerasa (Figure 6.9).[76] The Madaba inscription certainly evokes the symbolic valence of the palm, but might also preserve a kernel of local ritual practice, prescribing a particular form of worship for each individual who enters the church, such that the ritualized actions of individuals become a communal act. Emphasizing motion and action, the texts at Rome, Gerasa, and Madaba invite readers to pray to Christ and the saints in particular ways, as well as to join the community in praising God or raising a palm branch in honor of the martyrs.

Figure 6.9 Mosaic of the donor Soreg, pavement of the Chapel of Elias, Maria, and Soreg, Gerasa, early sixth century

Source: Courtesy of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, Mount Nebo, and the American Center of Oriental Research, Amman

At Sant'Andrea Catabarbara in Rome, formerly the basilica of Junius Bassus, which was converted into a church in the later fifth century, the dedicatory inscription, no longer extant but originally placed under a mosaic of Christ and the Apostles in the apse, went a step further in its promotion of a commercial model of salvation.[77] After recording in highly legalistic language the translation of the lawful title (*titulus iustus*) of the property to the church, performed by the wishes of the landowner Valila (*mens Valilae*), a high-ranking military official and a Goth, the inscription ends with an exhortation to the congregation:

> *Plebs devota, veni perq(ue) haec commercia disce*,
> *terreno censu regna superna peti*.
>
> Devoted people, come and learn from this transaction,
> to seek the kingdom above through earthly wealth.[78]

Faithful readers are invited to learn (*disce*) and follow the example of the patron by donating their earthly wealth (*terreno censu*) to the church in order to guarantee their place in the heavenly kingdom. Articulating a baldly commercial model of salvation, rather than a model veiled in more pious language, Valila's inscription

lays bare the process of wealth transfer from elites in cities like Rome to the Church, emphasizing that prayers alone may not be enough to gain devotees a guaranteed place in heaven.

In addition to encouraging prayer for particular returns, certain texts seem to implicitly engage with the issue of the public (communal) or private (individual) character of prayer. The inscription in the apse of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, no longer extant but put up by the empress Galla Placidia and her sons in the early fifth century, adapts Psalm 147 (148):11–12 to call for communal prayer from the poor and the rich alike: "Kings of the earth and all peoples [*omnes populi*], princes and all judges of the earth, praise the name of the Lord!"[79] The text exhorts the congregation (*omnes populi*) to join the royal patrons (Galla Placidia and her children as the *reges*) in praise of God in terms that would have been re-recited continuously as part of the normal liturgy of the church.[80] Placidia's inscription served at least two purposes, uniting different groups in the congregation to create a sense of community within the church while at the same time singling out Placidia and her family. In the apse conch of another, slightly later church in Rome, the Cappella di San Venanzio at the Lateran Baptistery, built in the early 640s, the last two lines of the mosaic inscription anticipate individual (rather than communal) responses: the chapel is where "any stepping [here] and, prostrate, adoring Christ, also may send their prayers they pour forth to heaven" (Figure 6.10).[81] While the response described is individual prayer (*preces*), it is a standardized one, described of each person who visits the space.

Placing prayers

Just as significant as the modes of prayer encouraged by these texts is their placement in sacred buildings. The placement of embedded prayers could draw attention to particular parts of the church – the frequent "hotspotting" effect of prayer graffiti clustered together on a wall, the movement-prompting circular arrangement of a prayer on the floor, or the placement of a text in a prominent spot in the church such as the apse. However, these written prayers also preserve internal emphases on placement in the form of location words or deictic markers of place (from δείκνυμι, "show"). Through words such as "here" or "there," the inscriptions not only locate the place of prayer but also connect patrons and readers to spots within the interior, creating networks of prayer between spaces in the same building as well as between buildings.

Exemplary of the use of prominent inscriptions to connect sacred spaces is the series of eighteen Latin epigrams commissioned by Pope Damasus in the 360s for installation in the tombs of important martyrs in the catacombs of Rome.[82] These texts and their material contexts have been much discussed in recent years, as scholars have focused on their verse features, including their use of quotations from Virgil and Ovid; their visual features, most notably their impressive majuscule script, invented for the project by the famous scribe Furius Dionysius Filocalus, as well as their standardized tabular format; and their impact upon the increasing monumentalization of the catacombs in the later fourth century. Erik

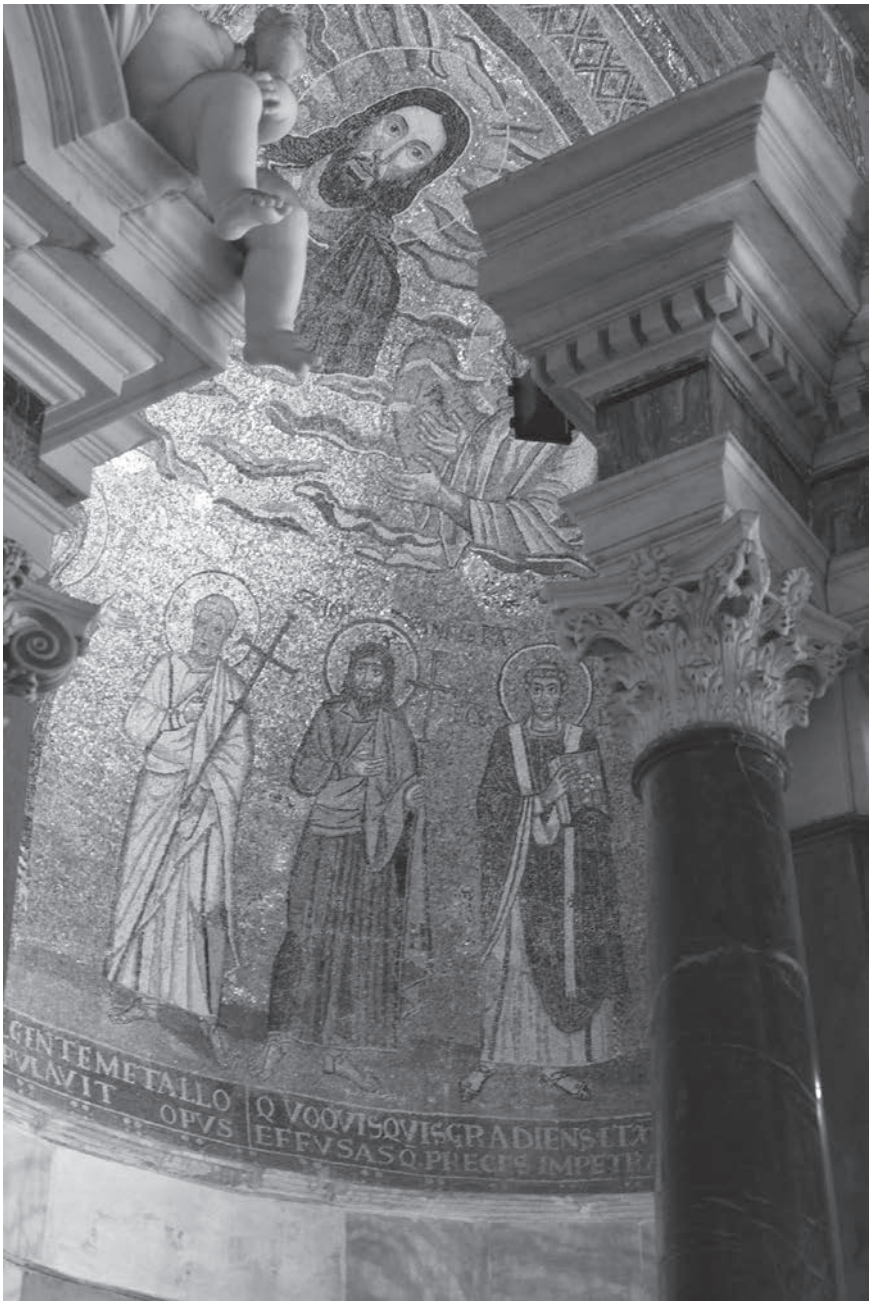

Figure 6.10 Apse mosaic with inscription, Cappella di San Venanzio, Lateran Baptistery, Rome, 640s

Source: Photograph by author

Thunø and others have examined the epigrams as a group intended to identify the martyrs of Rome as a "unified collective body," networking their burial spaces within the catacombs that ringed the city, encouraging visitors to move between them to pay their respects to the martyrs at their tombs.[83]

Within churches and other sacred buildings on both sides of the Mediterranean, donors placed prayers on the floors and walls, sometimes "writing" (in mosaic) their prayers alone, and other times combining prayers with lengthier dedications. Because of the prevalent interest in the dedications of late antique churches as records of patronage, the more pious aspects of the texts have often been overlooked. Their multiple functions have prompted Ann Marie Yasin to call these texts that "confound Greco-Roman categories," allowing donors to make verbal and visual statements about their pious acts of church building and decoration, linking parts of the church or the entire building to an individual or group.[84] Often placed at entrances, larger-scale dedications-*cum*-prayers encouraged readers to associate the entire building with the donor(s), as in a Christian building at the site of Kallion in south-central Greece, which proclaimed, "In the time of the most pious priest Dionysios, the holy [church?] was renewed from the foundations and decorated with mosaic. All those entering, pray for him and for his entire household."[85] Upon walking into the structure, the faithful are asked to pray for Dionysios and his family (Figure 6.11). Interestingly, the building preserves three shorter inscriptions which are quite different in character, recording the exact amounts of money that donors gave to the church, which paid for parts of the mosaic pavement. Agathokles, Hilaria, and their son Alexandros gave one gold *semissis* (a half-*solidus*), and another anonymous donor gave "one gold piece"

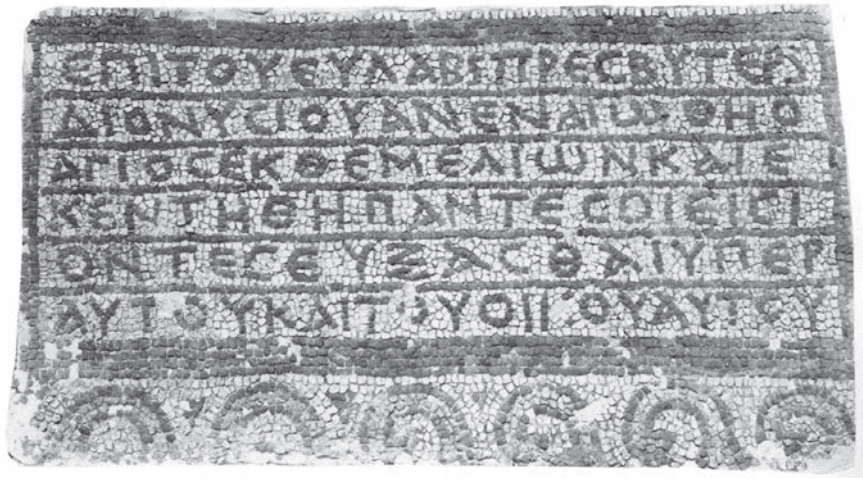

Figure 6.11 Mosaic inscription from the entrance of a Christian building (church?), Kallion, Greece, early sixth century

Source: Photograph by kind permission of Panayiota Atzaka

(χρυσίου ἑνός), while Zosimos gave a *tremissis* (a third-*solidus*), the amount necessary in order to "write" this inscription (ἔγραψε[ν τρ]ιμισσίου), a striking connection between the text and its circumstances of production.[86] This strategy of recording the monetary amount, either in terms of coinage or in terms of the number of "feet" paid for by donors, was not unique to the eastern Mediterranean, as the "subscription" model was an effective one to fund the expensive construction and decoration of a building for the community (and indeed, a strategy still seen today in institutions like museums).[87] However, these texts were not only dry records of monetary donations to the church, but were also part of the fulfillment of vows or prayers (εὐχαί) made to God: as Zosimos's inscription records, "Zosimos, for his vow and [the vow] of his entire household."[88] These prayer-donations were not unique to churches, and similar texts appear in synagogues, as in the fourth-century synagogue at Apamea, which features a number of inscriptions in Greek that record donors fulfilling their vows through donations to the synagogue, each featuring similar formulae presented in an identical format, framed by a red square.[89]

As with earlier offerings, otherwise formulaic dedications frequently make clear their close ties to the building or work of art described or referred to through use of deictics to link inscriptions with images or built environments.[90] Inscriptions frequently use deictic markers to locate themselves in particular areas of churches, as in the dedicatory inscription of the Basilica of St. Demetrios at Nikopolis in Greece, which begins: "Here [ἔνθα] you see" the (image of) earth and ocean.[91] Christians must have been accustomed to seeing buildings or parts of buildings made specific by deictics, linking parts of buildings to specific donors and contextualizing images, buildings, and their patrons in terms of a grand network of Christian "good works" (euergetism).[92] Even short inscriptions make use of formulae such as "this work of mosaic,"[93] "this work,"[94] "this place,"[95] or simply "this" or "these,"[96] to link space to donor(s) or, in the case of a number of churches in North Africa, to deceased members of the clergy and congregation.[97]

By building networks of space through the use of deictics, many of these dedications also linked the votive prayers of which they were a part to points within the sacred interior, inviting readers to participate in the same kind of "in the round" viewing (*perigeseis*) as did the ekphrastic inscriptions considered in Chapter 4. As clergy and laypeople walked around outside and inside the church, encountering inscribed prayers at different parts of the building, they came face to face with a network of prayers for important individuals in the community. A church at ʿEvron in northern Israel preserves a number of mosaic inscriptions that testify to the importance donors attributed to leaving behind their petitions in material form (Figure 6.12).[98] Built around 415 CE, the church's mosaics were renovated twice in the course of the fifth century, first in 442/443 and again in 490, making it possible to chart the changes in its epigraphic and decorative programs. In the first phase, the mosaicists included three inscriptions on the eastern side of the atrium pavement, near the church: one, a dedicatory inscription (no. 4 on the plan), recording the deacons who presided over different phases of construction ("Under deacons Silvanos and Alexon the roof was purchased");[99] and

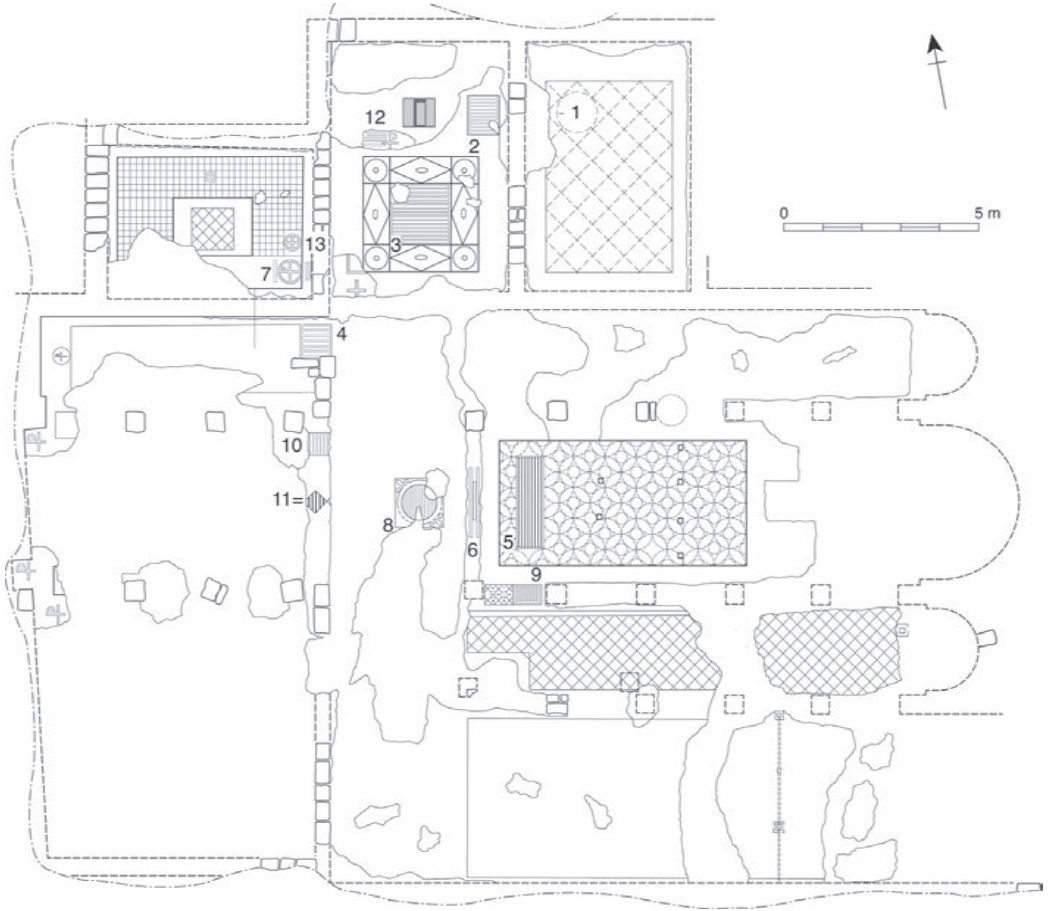

Figure 6.12 Plan and diagram of the mosaics of the church at ʿEvron, Israel, fifth century

Source: Plan by Alison Wilkins, after Tzaferis 1987, Ill. 1

two further fragmentary invocations for remembrance of donors, one of which reads: "Lord, remember . . . [and?] Domnina her daughter" (no. 10).[100] In the pavement of a room on the northwestern side of the church, which appears to have served as a *diakonikon*, two further inscriptions present similar invocations: "Lord Jesus Christ, remember your servant Julianos and the mosaicist Paul . . ." "Lord Jesus Christ, remember Ammanos and Euthalios" (nos. 7, 13).[101] Nearby, an inscription in Syriac, one of the earliest to survive from a church pavement in the region, records a list of donors' names, attesting to the multicultural composition of the congregation.[102]

The second phase of the ʿEvron church, dated by inscription to 442/443, included the nave pavement, as well as a subsidiary room north of the narthex, which appears to have been used as a *diakonikon* and baptistery. The main dedications of each space are notable for their near obsession with recording the names of clergymen, who were also donors to the church: the text in the nave, for instance, names twenty-nine individuals, including a bishop, priest, archdeacon, deacons, subdeacons, and readers (no. 5).[103] The prayers of these men are not included in the nave inscription, but other texts present donors' requests for remembrance in the same language as did the inscriptions of the earlier phase: in the *diakonikon*-baptistery, for example, next to a Chi-Rho symbol, "Lord, remember Aion and Samakon and Arion" (no. 12).[104] While the invocations are separated by several decades, they all present the prayers of donors (who were also clerics), using the same formula to emphasize the connection between God and donor, and to memorialize donors ("Lord, remember . . ."). In the pavement of the nave, two further texts shine light on changes in the presentation of prayers in the church. Between the columns that separated the nave and the southern aisle, a seven-line inscription recorded the special connection between a donor, Valentinus, and God: "One God [εἷς Θεὸς] who helps Valentinus, the one donor" (no. 9).[105] The symmetry of this inscription is striking: the first line, an acclamation to the "one God," is balanced by the description of Valentinus as the "one donor" (lit. "the one who has borne fruit"). Employing a popular form of divine address ("one God") used in prayers by Christians as well as Jews and Samaritans, the donor with a Latin name marks out his singular connection with God.[106]

Placed at the entrance of the nave is a very different kind of inscription that addresses the full congregation and clergy as they enter the church: "And under the *periodeutos* Eisakios the church was decorated with mosaic. Peace be your entrance and your exit" (no. 6).[107] Oriented to the west, to be read by those coming into the church, the call for "peace" shapes the reader's experience of the church as a building that brings safety and security through reference to that sacred Christian text, the Bible. In fact, the text combines a standard dedication (of Eisakios) with a text that does not directly appear in the Bible, but that is a modified version of 1 Samuel 16:4, where Samuel is asked by the elders of Bethlehem, "Do you come in peace?" Some readers may have read a reference to the regular liturgy in the text, as "peace" – the greeting or kiss of peace, derived from Christ's words to his disciples ("Peace be with you," John 20:19), as well as references to the "peace of Christ" – was a presence in the popular liturgies of the late antique east.[108] This

emphasis was not unique to the east, and epigraphic references to "peace" also occur in North African interiors, as in the short inscription from the pavement of the north aisle of the fourth-century cathedral church at Chlef (previously Orléansville) in modern-day Algeria, which reads "Peace always."[109] Synagogue inscriptions also feature invocations of "peace," especially "Peace unto Israel."[110] But the biblical character of the ʿEvron text asks for more from its readers: it is not a mere wish for a peaceful life for the Christian community, but a deliberate evocation of the foundational text of the religion that was meant to transform the nature of the church building itself.

Sanctifying the interior, part by part

The concern evident in the ʿEvron inscription for marking the church as a sacred space is striking and forces us to confront the role of sacred texts (biblical or Qurʾanic) in buildings of worship, a new feature of buildings associated with the three Abrahamic religions. We have already seen several examples of texts derived from the Old and New Testaments, used in Christian buildings such as the Propylaea Church at Gerasa. From the fourth to the sixth century in particular, Christians put up a large number of inscriptions that quoted or paraphrased biblical texts in order to map the words of the Bible onto the interior of their churches. In a recent essay, Leah Di Segni identified over a hundred examples from sacred and secular buildings in Palestine and Arabia alone.[111] We have discussed several of these previously, including the number of biblical quotations that serve as *tituli* ("titles") in scenes of Samson's deeds or of the peaceful kingdom.[112] The majority of quotations from Christian spaces, east and west, are closer in character to the invocation of peace from the church at ʿEvron, texts that greeted readers and encouraged them to reflect on the actions one takes in sacred spaces. As at ʿEvron, biblical texts were frequently placed at important points within the church – at doorways (floor mosaics and lintels), in between the columns that separated the nave from the aisles, near the boundary between the nave and the sanctuary – where a large number of visitors to the building were likely to read them, but also where the texts were able to provide a spiritual frame for the building, invoking divine protection for important spaces.[113]

Most of these texts quote or adapt passages from the Book of Psalms, a natural source for inscribed prayers because of the invocation-heavy language of that particular book, which had long been excerpted for prayers in liturgies as well as inscriptions.[114] In this period, the psalms were seen as mirrors for self-reflection, a kind of "script for understanding the self."[115] Psalms were often memorized by the faithful, making these texts natural ones for inscription, as the short excerpt carved, painted, or laid in mosaic would act as an *aide-mémoire* for the entire psalm for a wide range of readers.[116] Interestingly, while the psalms were popular with Jews as well as Christians, different groups selected different texts for their sacred spaces.

Very few inscriptions from Jewish contexts quote extended biblical passages. Two lengthy inscriptions from the mosaic pavements of synagogues at ʿEn Gedi

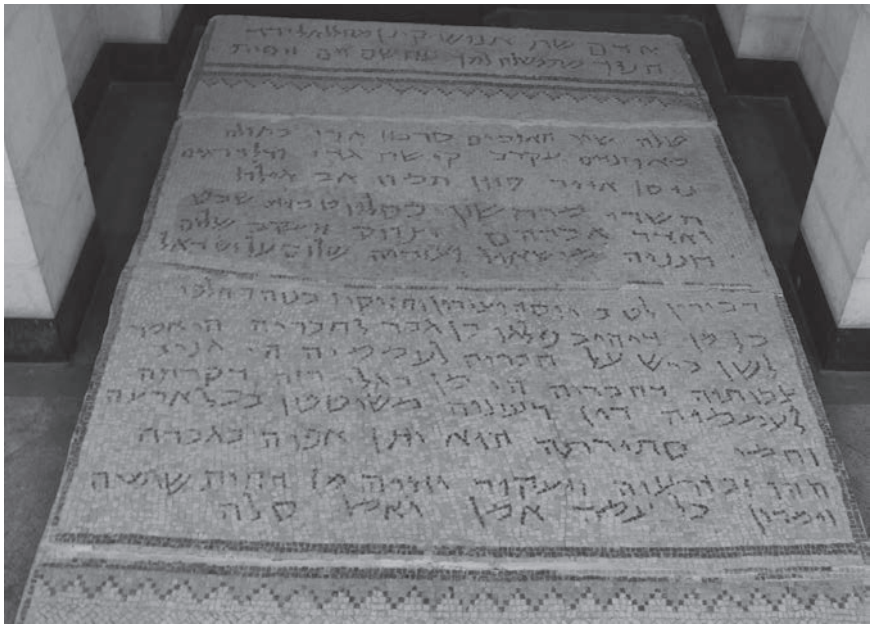

Figure 6.13 Mosaic inscription, synagogue at ʿEn Gedi, Palestine, fifth to seventh century
Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

(fifth to seventh century) and Rehov (sixth to seventh century) have been studied at length due to their unusual contents, which relate to Jewish agricultural laws (at Rehov) as well as including lists of biblical figures (the thirteen ancestors of the human race, beginning with Adam, the three patriarchs, the three Hebrews who survived the fiery furnace), the signs of the zodiac, and the names of the months (at ʿEn Gedi) (Figure 6.13).[117] While they do contain biblical content – the lists of the ʿEn Gedi inscription, as well as the laws of the Rehov inscription, drawn from the Torah as well as Talmudic and rabbinic legal traditions – these texts reveal an intensely local set of priorities: the ʿEn Gedi inscription, for example, placed in the entrance hall of the synagogue, concludes with a warning against revealing the "secret of the town," which may relate to the local balsam industry. This latter part of the inscription is written in Aramaic, as opposed to the lists, which are written in Hebrew, further demonstrating the local orientation of the text for an Aramaic-speaking and reading audience.

The vast majority of surviving examples of inscriptions that quote or adapt biblical passages come from Christian contexts east and west. A visitor to the Cappella di Santa Croce at the Lateran Baptistery in Rome in the late fifth century would have encountered an inscription of Psalm 5 (6):8 above the doors of the building's entrance: "I will come, Lord, into your house, and I will worship

towards your holy temple in fear of you."[118] Reading the text aloud, a visitor voices the biblical passage in the first person, allowing them to anticipate their actions (worship) and emotional state (fear or awe) inside. The text anticipates the actions of the entering faithful as well as the expected divine response articulated by the rest of the psalm, which promises the protection of God for the faithful.[119] The reference to the chapel as God's house (*domum*) and temple/Temple (*templum sanctum*) conditions the reader to embrace the space as a portal into biblical time and space, a kind of much-abbreviated and generalized version of the inscriptions of the Madaba Map, considered in the previous chapter.

While Psalm 5 is not commonly quoted in inscriptions from the period, a number of texts written at the entrances and exits of churches quote other psalms that also actively "biblicize" the interior. A number of these texts are excerpted to fit their new architectural contexts. Most frequently, entrance inscriptions quote the last line of Psalm 120 (121):8: "The Lord will guard your entrance and exit." While the text is not only used in sacred contexts – a number of extant versions of this type of inscription were carved onto the lintels of houses, especially in Syria – it does feature in a number of Christian buildings in Palestine and Arabia, including in the atrium of the crypt of St. Peter in Gallicantu in Jerusalem, written in the seventh-century phase of the building constructed to mark the spot where it was believed that Peter denied Christ three times (Figure 6.14).[120] A review of the appearances of this particular line of the psalm indicates that while the text is always placed near liminal points, these can be located in different parts of the building: at an entrance to a chapel,[121] or in front of the sanctuary.[122] The association between the psalm as inscribed and its architectural context is consistent, but also flexible. The preceding line of Psalm 120 (121):7, "May the Lord guard you against all evil," also appears in Christian structures, as in another building

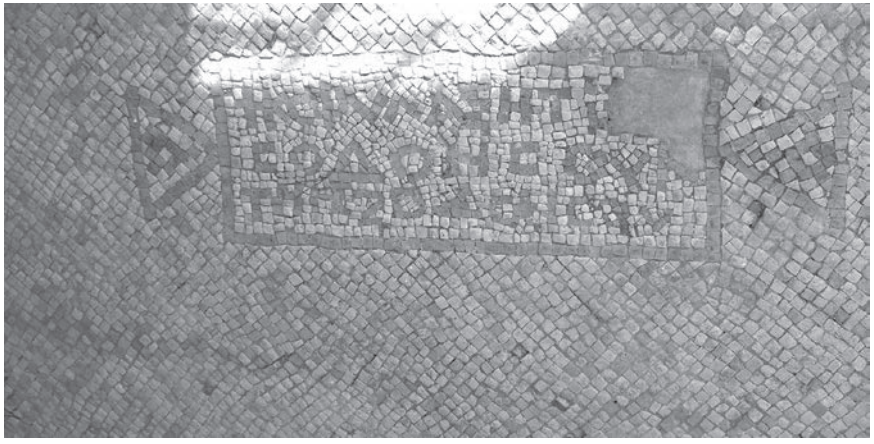

Figure 6.14 Mosaic inscription from the entrance pavement, atrium of the crypt of St. Peter in Gallicantu, Jerusalem, seventh century

Source: Photograph by author

in Jerusalem, the Chapel of St. Anna on the Mount of Olives, dated to the early seventh century and now the site of the Dominus Flevit Church.[123] Interestingly, the two lines of this psalm are found united together only in inscriptions carved onto lintels in Syria, reflecting the popularity of biblical quotations in the region, especially drawn from the Book of Psalms.[124]

Lintels in Syria also pair the text of Psalm 120 (121):8 with that of Psalm 117 (118):20: "This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it" (αὕτη ἡ πύλη τοῦ Κυρίου οἱ δίκαιοι εἰσελεύσονται ἐν αὐτῇ).[125] This latter verse is found by itself as well in at least fifty-two inscriptions.[126] At the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, the passage is inscribed within a *tabula ansata* on a projection (machicolation) on the outer walls, above the entrance to the sixth-century fortress-monastery.[127] A version of the biblical passage also appears in at least seven church mosaic pavements across the eastern Mediterranean, in Palestine, Arabia, Greece, Cyprus, and southwestern Turkey (Lycia).[128] In the Basilica of St. Demetrios at Nikopolis in Greece, it appears at the western end of the nave, close to the entrance, as the last line of a five-line dedicatory inscription that begins with a nod to *topoi* popularized by the late antique Egyptian poet Nonnus: "A stone flashing from God's grace here and there [dedication of Dometios]. . . . This is the gate of the Lord; righteous people, go in!"[129] The first line of the text's emphasis on light and flash, already discussed in Chapter 4, is paired with an evocation of the "stone" (λίθος) of the church, an architectural emphasis brought back in the version of the psalm in the final line of the text, which is turned into a command (using the aorist imperative form of the verb "go in," εἰσέρχομαι) to the "righteous people" to enter the church. Several of these inscriptions, including an inscription in the mosaic pavement of the entrance into a sixth-century church (the so-called Upper Church) at Abu-Hof in the Negev Desert, in modern Israel, quote the preceding line of Psalm 117 (118) as well: "Open to me the gates of righteousness, (and) going into them, I will give praise to the Lord."[130] Quoting two lines of the psalm rather than one, the inscription simultaneously works to define the church as a sacred place (the entrance as the "gate of the Lord") and to personalize the space, allowing the faithful as they read the text to define themselves as one of the "righteous" before entering the building.

A particularly interesting example of this type of inscription appears in front of the doorway of the North Church at Herodion, in Palestine, dated roughly to the fifth century (Figures 6.15 and 6.16).[131] The entrance to the church is unusually arranged, as one enters the narthex not through a larger portal in the western part of the room, but in the south, through a narrow door that would have channeled visitors slowly into the building.[132] This is not the only odd feature of the small building – another is the shallow built-in bench that runs along three of the walls – nor the only inscription, but it would have been the first and last text that visitors to the church encountered.[133] This entrance-and-exit inscription is written onto the threshold of the main doorway from the narthex to the nave, and it presents a more-or-less standard version of Psalm 120 (121):8, though the arrangement and precise forms of the words differ from other examples. The line from the psalm does not appear alone, but with an invocation (also a dedication) for two donors,

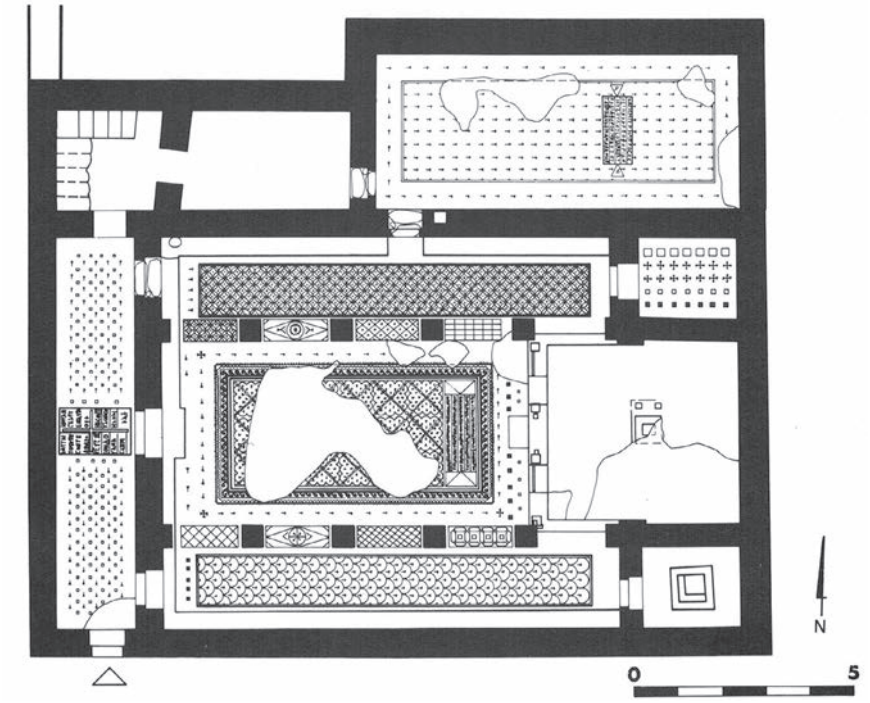

Figure 6.15 Plan, North Church at Herodion, Palestine, fifth century

Source: After Netzer, Birger-Calderon, and Feller 1993, 222, by permission of the Israel Exploration Society

Anael and Saprika. The most unusual feature of this particular iteration of the psalm is its frame, the subdivided rectangular shape of which is directly linked to the architectural interest of the text: it is conceived of as a door, or perhaps better, as the "gate of the Lord" (πύλη τοῦ Κυρίου), of the psalm, a relative of the "object" frames discussed in Chapter 3.[134] While the text does not read as a particularly sophisticated visual presentation of a "door" in black-and-white images, the mosaicists clearly intended to differentiate the side "posts" of the two-dimensional "door," including the side on which the "door" would hinge, which is highlighted with a line of red tesserae.[135] Despite the inscription's seeming lack of sophistication, evident in its rough letterforms and irregular line arrangement, the text and its layout are harmonized in a manner that is lacking in all other examples of the psalm-as-inscription. At Herodion, the biblical text has determined the form of the inscribed text, turning the building, despite its small size, into an earthly version of the heavenly kingdom for congregants.

All of these texts featuring passages from psalms that emphasize the act of entering and exiting are placed either at or next to the thresholds of doorways,

Figure 6.16 Detail, doorframe inscription, mosaic pavement of the entrance of the North Church, Herodion

Source: After Netzer, Birger-Calderon, and Feller 1993, pl. XVI, C, by permission of the Israel Exploration Society

though not always at the main entrance to the church. Additionally, despite the tendency of the inscriptions to orient themselves in the direction of the sanctuary (east), an orientation that makes sense if the text was meant to be read by those entering the building, there are a number of inscriptions arranged in reverse: the "door"-framed inscription at Herodion, for example, is placed at the entrance to the nave but faces to the west, making it easier to read as you exit the building. The reason for the western orientation of these examples is unclear, and has invited speculation on issues of audience: for example, William Caraher has argued that the inscriptions at Nikopolis and Arkasas were oriented to the west because the

clergy was the main audience for the mosaics of the nave, as the congregants, for the most part, would have been forced to stand in the aisles.[136] However, members of the congregation would still have been able to see the inscriptions on their way into and out of the basilica. This audience-specific explanation also fails to account for why some examples of this particular psalm, which specifies entry, were aimed at those processing out of the building. Regional preferences may have played a role – for example, the surviving examples in Greece (Nikopolis, Arkasas) are both oriented to the west – but the flexibility in orientation, as well as in verbal content, suggests that the architectural nature of the psalm quoted or adapted was more important than the specific passage chosen.

Independent of their orientation and precise phrasing, this group of texts invoking heavily biblicized models of entry and exit drawn from the psalms deserves more serious attention than it has received thus far. In addition to clearly defining entrances and other liminal spaces within the church, the inscriptions make physical the otherwise mental translation of a Christian interior to a heavenly one. What are we to do with these texts, which are at the same time straightforward evocations of the sacred character of the church (or texts meant to protect the houses of the faithful), and participants in a complicated nexus of space, action, and time that stretches from the biblical past to the late antique "present" and beyond, to the promise of heaven? Calvin Kendall has charted the development of what he calls the "allegory of the church," and reads the inscriptions associated with entrances into the church according to different levels of allegory, including the interpretation of the church building as allegory for the heavenly city of Jerusalem, and its door as the gate of heaven.[137] Kendall pays special attention to the inscriptions put up by Paulinus in the complex of the Church of St. Felix at Nola, already considered in the previous chapter, which included inscriptions in Latin on the screen (*transenna*) that connected, as well as separated, Felix's old church with that of the new church built by Paulinus, the Church of the Apostles.[138] These texts encouraged allegorical readings of the three arched openings of the *transenna* as a reference to the Trinity in stone: "One faith which worships one God under three names receives those who are one in heart through a triple entrance."[139]

While Paulinus's text is not a direct quotation of a psalm, it makes up for its lack of textual fidelity with its creatively biblical frame for the physical and spiritual experiences of visitors to the church. Inscriptions such as that of Paulinus, as well as others that quote specific psalms, served as catalysts for the "spiritual transformation" of visitors,[140] collapsing the biblical past, present, and future for readers, bringing the Bible to life "in the 'here' and 'now,'"[141] and inviting readers to encounter the church building as a place that vibrated back and forth between earthly and heavenly realms. Interestingly, the majority of the surviving examples that quote these architectural psalms date to the sixth century or later, the same period when changes in the major liturgies introduced an emphasis on reenactment of biblical narratives in the context of the prayers surrounding the Eucharist.[142] Wherever the church was sited in terms of its geography, this group of psalms perhaps allowed the church to evoke the Holy Land for readers,

transporting them backwards to the time and the places of the miracles of Christ, but also propelling them forwards to their anticipated entrance into heaven.

Another architectural psalm that appears at or near the entrances of churches from the sixth century onwards, and which is focused on the holy city of Jerusalem even more than the psalms discussed this far, is Psalm 86 (87):2: "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the tents of Jacob" (Ἀγαπᾷ Κ(ύριο-)ς τὰς πύλας Σιὼν ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ σκηνώματα Ἰακώβ). This particular line of the psalm is extant from the mosaic pavements of three churches in Palestine and Arabia. Two of these examples, at Horvat Hesheq (sixth century) and in the Church on the Acropolis at Maʿin (719/720) appear in the entrance pavements of the churches,[143] with the latter also quoting Psalm 117 (already discussed) in order to emphasize even further the sacred character of the church's architecture.[144] A third example, in the Church of the Bishop Sergius at Umm al-Rasas (c. 587/588), is placed between the nave and the sanctuary, at the foot of the chancel steps (Figure 6.17).[145] This particular psalm celebrates the divinely ordained supremacy of Jerusalem over all other cities, and was used by fourth- and fifth-century Christian theologians such as Jerome to contrast the physical gates of the city of Jerusalem with the gates of Hell, which the Christian church guards, and to evoke the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation 22:14.[146] While Psalm 86 is quoted only a handful of times in Christian spaces, these examples in fact expand the flexibility of the "architectural" psalm while also

Figure 6.17 Detail, chancel inscription, mosaic pavement of the Church of the Bishop Sergius, Umm al-Rasas, Jordan, 587/588

Source: Sean V. Leatherbury/Manar al-Athar

making it more specific: they turn these village churches into a kind of reflection of "Zion," the city of Jerusalem.[147] By placing the psalm at important liminal spaces in the church, patrons were able to recreate the heavenly Jerusalem within their more humble spaces while emphasizing their connections to the earthly Jerusalem nearby.[148] When clergy or congregants entered the church or approached the altar and read the psalm, they were symbolically entering the heavenly city through the "gates" or doors of the church.

A different kind of biblical reference to the "gates" (τὰς πύλας) of the holy city versus the "tents" of Jacob (σκηνώματα) comes from a large sixth- or seventh-century church at Abila of the Decapolis, modern Quwaylibah in Jordan, where "tents" are given pride of place: "[How lovely] are your tents, Lord of Hosts. My soul yearns and [faints (?)] for the halls [of the Lord]."[149] Appearing in the center of the nave pavement, the quotation of Psalm 83 (84):2–3 adopts a different metaphor for the church, the "hall(s) of the Lord."[150] That architectural psalms such as Psalms 83 and 86 were used to glorify sacred architecture by reference to biblical models is clear from the use of a third passage from the Old Testament in the purported reaction of the empress Eudokia (d. 460) to the monastery of Euthymios in the Judean Desert, as reported by Cyril of Scythopolis: "How fair are your dwellings, O Jacob, and your tents, O Israel" (Numbers 24:5).[151] The flexibility seen in these texts suggests that while biblical models were important, they could in fact be adapted to suit a range of local needs and preferences.

While synagogue inscriptions rarely included lengthy biblical quotations, as we have seen previously, several prominent buildings constructed under Umayyad rule featured inscribed texts that quoted passages from the Qurʾan. Most famous among these is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, built by the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik in the 690s on the Haram al-Sharif or Temple Mount, the location of the Jewish Temple before its destruction by Roman armies in 70 CE. In the interior of the building, golden texts in Arabic wend their way around the exterior and interior of the octagonal arcade that encircles the rotunda, and appear to have been selected based on their anti-Christian, and especially anti-Trinitarian, character (Figure 6.18). One passage from the inner octagon, for example, reads, "So believe in God and His messengers, and say not 'Three' – cease! [it is] better for you! – God is only one God."[152] For Muslim visitors to the building, these texts, read as the words of Allah transmitted through the prophet Muhammad, would have confirmed the supremacy of their religion over Christianity.

Two other great Umayyad buildings, the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Great Mosque of Medina, also displayed Qurʾanic inscriptions in mosaic, though neither program survives, and the latter monument is now the location of a mosque built during the Ottoman period.[153] Each of these epigraphic programs was substantially different – though both the Damascus and Medina mosques included the first part of the Qurʾan (1:1–7), the contents of each are otherwise almost completely unique. In Damascus, the mihrab wall was apparently adorned with texts that were eschatologically inflected, just as were a number of texts from Christian contexts, drawing the reader's mind to the Day of Judgment, and the importance of belief and good works during one's life.[154]

Figure 6.18 Detail, encircling inscription, wall mosaic, Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, 690s

Source: Elias Khamis/Manar al-Athar

A more recently uncovered series of Qurʾanic inscriptions, incised and painted onto the walls of the mosque and adjacent North Church at Shivta in the Negev in the first half of the eighth century, includes yet another group of different texts that act to define the space of the mosque as holy, shape the acts of the faithful, and invoke divine protection for the community: one of the texts concludes, "And help us against the people of the unbelievers."[155] Interestingly, another of the inscriptions displays the same kind of cut-and-paste quotation style as some of the Christian biblical inscriptions (e.g. the psalm verses combined on lintels from Syria, discussed above), merging together texts from different suras (Qurʾan 72:18, 18:110, 7:54, 25:29), which praise God as creator and prescribe the proper behavior of worshippers: "The mosques belong to Allah; so call not, along with Allah, upon anyone."[156] Bilha Moor has suggested that the texts of the inscriptions may be related to a popular sermon delivered at the mosque, which, if correct, would emphasize both the local focus of the text as well as the function of inscriptions to memorialize otherwise ephemeral verbal performances.[157] Epigraphic flexibility, it seems, was not restricted to Christian and Jewish spheres, allowing early Muslim communities to adopt the fragmented aesthetic of the late antique period in order to emphasize particular themes for different groups of readers.[158]

Writing, reading, seeing, praying

Across faiths, inscriptions from the period that quote from biblical or Qurʾanic sources share a focus on architectural themes and on local communities of readers. While all of these texts implicitly assume a reader, who may be asked to adopt a biblical "voice," some are more concerned with the language of reading and writing, drawing attention to a specific writer to memorialize that individual, or, perhaps more interestingly, drawing attention to the act of reading as a way to connect to the divine.[159] In the Church of St. Menas at Rihab in northern Jordan, the text of the mosaic dedicatory inscription in the pavement between the nave and the aisle, not far from the sanctuary, testifies that it "was written [<Ἐ>γράφη] in the month of March, of the eighth indiction, of the year 529 (635 CE)."[160] A similar inscription in the pavement of the sanctuary of the church at Houedjit Halaoua in Syria (471), written in Syriac rather than Greek, preserves the memories of the patrons "whoever participated in this work, and of the sinner who writes these letters."[161] The "sinner" is not named, and might be the scribe who composed the inscription, or perhaps the mosaicist.[162] In the same vein, a short Greek inscription in the narthex pavement of the fifth- or early sixth-century chapel at Shiloh in Palestine asks the Lord to "remember" (μνήσθητι) the patrons as well as "the writer" (τοῦ γράψοντος).[163] These short, formulaic references to writing preserve hints of the composition and production process of inscriptions. Examples survive of carved inscriptions that emphasize in like fashion their own existence as texts written down before they were inscribed.[164] However, these mosaic inscriptions would have drawn the reader's attention even more strongly, precisely because one did not "write" mosaic inscriptions but laid them piece by piece.[165] This focus would have encouraged the reader to think on the patrons, who, at least at Houedjit Halaoua, were left anonymous, intended to create a special bond between them and God.

In extant Latin dedications from Croatia and North Africa, the small group of references to the production or reception of the text are focused on the act of reading instead of writing. Two floor mosaic inscriptions substitute a form of the verb "read" (*lego*) in place of a verb of sight, focusing attention on the inscriptions themselves rather than on the geometric or vegetal/figural patterns of the surrounding mosaic decoration. In the fifth-century Pre-Eufrasian Basilica at Poreč, a mosaic inscription from the east side of the north aisle pavement instructs the reader "who reads (this)" (*qui leg[is]*) to "have us [the donors Felicissimus and Nigasius or Nigasia] in mind" (*in mente no[s habeas]*).[166]

Another text, the last four lines of a long mosaic inscription from the sixth-century nave pavement of the Church of the Martyrs at Haïdra in Tunisia (also known as Basilica II, or the Basilica of Candidus) goes further, setting up an explicit comparison between reading and believing:

Felix
semper vivat qui intentissime lege-
rit, felicior qui Deo omnipotenti per Chr(is-)
t(um) eius tota fide crediderit. +

> May he who has read it most intently always live happily; happier he who has entrusted all his faith in God Omnipotent through Christ.+[167]

This text, repeated with slightly varied spellings on one of the sides of the stone balustrade in the center of the nave, draws attention to the relationship between reading and faith, a modified version of the dichotomy set up by the Latin inscriptions considered in Chapter 2 that emphasize a focus on faith over appreciation of the building's decoration.

At the same time as it promotes faith as the supreme goal, the inscription at Haïdra seems to play with the classical trope of the "good life" achieved through the proper interpretation of texts and images through *paideia*. This kind of "good life" is encouraged in the *Tablet of Cebes*, a text written in the first century that presents an imagined dialogue between an old philosopher and a crowd of viewers of the images depicted upon a votive tablet dedicated to Kronos.[168] While the crowd struggles to understand the images on the tablet, the philosopher offers his own exegesis of the images, declaring that those who pay attention to his interpretation will be "wise and happy" (φρόνιμοι καὶ εὐδαίμονες), while those who do not listen will remain "unwise . . . unlearned" (ἄφρονες . . . ἀμαθεῖς), and "lead a bad sort of life" (κακῶς βιώσεσθε).[169] The text inscribed twice in the Church of the Martyrs inverts this belief in salvation achieved through reading and interpretation. By encouraging the reader to put his or her faith in God rather than focusing on the words of the text, the inscription seems to privilege faith over its own consumption as composed text. In this case, in order to ensure lasting happiness, one must be a faithful Christian, not simply a learned one.[170] Related advice is found in other sacred contexts, as on a marble plaque in the Sardis synagogue in Turkey, found near the base of the Torah Shrine, which urged the faithful to read and observe the laws of the Torah: "Find, open, read, observe [my commandments]."[171] Closing with a command to observe Jewish law, the text makes it clear that simply reading is not enough.

However, at Haïdra, the hierarchy established between reading and trusting in God is challenged by the repetition of the inscription, as the lengthy text appears twice in the central nave of the church, in mosaic and again in stone. The mosaic version concludes by listing the names of thirty-four martyrs, some of whom are not attested in any other source. This excess of text subverts the notion that reading is insufficient, cleverly reasserting the power of inscriptions to convey information about the donor and act as a focus for prayer to the numerous martyrs of the inscription who are buried in the church.

Prayers for the faithful

If we return to the prayers laid in mosaic in the Madaba church with which we began the chapter, it becomes clear that while most embedded prayers preserved (in some form) otherwise ephemeral verbal prayers in order to encourage their re-performance, not all of them functioned in the same way as did that at Madaba. A small group of inscriptions from Christian contexts advise prayer through images,

as did the Madaba inscription; but others encourage prayer through movement around the interior of the sacred space, shaping the verbal, physical, and mental experiences of readers through their arrangements. Texts ask readers to pray for different blessings – healing, the atonement of sins, salvation – and in the process encourage ritual motion or action by the individual or the community. Many inscribed prayers, especially shorter, more formulaic ones, employ deictics, using the language of place to connect patrons and readers to particular parts of the building, creating a network of linked prayers and people. Prayers written into late antique sacred spaces rely on the sacred texts of different dispensations – Jewish, Christian, and Muslim – but share a focus on architecture, interpreted through the words of the Bible or the Qurʾan, and on defining the community of faithful who constructed and used the building. These texts reflect the late antique love of the fragment, which, in the case of excerpts from longer texts such as the psalms, allowed a relatively short inscription to open up a wider world of sacred narrative for readers. Recognizing the power of embedded prayers to shape the character of sacred space for a range of audiences, patrons, and artists, who were sometimes one and the same, reminded readers of the "writtenness" of the texts, which could evoke the person behind the prayer or, alternatively, call into question the connection between erudition and faith.

Notes

1 Piccirillo 1989a, 1993, 50–132.
2 Piccirillo 1989a, 41–50, 61–6, 1993, 64–5. On the date of the church, which was incorrectly read in earlier publications, Di Segni 1992, 1994a.
3 Piccirillo 1989a, 50–60, 1993, 66–7.
4 Maguire 1994, reprinted in Maguire 1998, ch. 8; Osborne 2014; Leatherbury 2016a.
5 Piccirillo 1989a, 48–9; *I.Jordanie* 130; Piccirillo 1993*,* 65; Rhoby 2009*,* 394–5, with full bibliography. While Rhoby's interpolation of the verb "find" makes metrical sense, it must be noted (as Rhoby does) that the mosaic itself leaves no room for it, either because of an error by the mosaicist in copying the text, or an error in its composition.
6 Hamarneh 2015 suggests the presence of a wall mosaic in the church; Talgam 2014, 396–8, prefers a painted portrait. In Hagia Sophia, part of the outline of the previous (pre-Iconoclastic) Virgin and Child, which were larger than the current pair, is still visible: Mango 1962, 80–3; Mango and Hawkins 1965; Cormack 1981; Oikonomèdes 1985.
7 On the visual effects of the mosaic, Franses 2003. The mosaic also features an inscription celebrating the return of the images, of which only fragments survive *in situ*; the text is preserved in its entirety as *AG* 1.1; Rhoby 2009, M9.
8 Scholarship traditionally places the development of Mary's role as intercessor in literature and artistic compositions such as the *deesis* in later centuries: Averil Cameron 2004, xxvii–xxxii; Pentcheva 2006, 111–13. On the intercessory role of the Virgin in the *deesis* (with Christ and John the Baptist), Walter 1968, 1970; Cutler 1987. On the iconography of the enthroned Virgin, Lidova 2015, 2016.
9 ἁγνὸν χρὴ ναοῖο θυώδεος ἐντὸς ἰόντα ἔμμεναι, ἁγνεία δ᾽ἐστὶ φρονεῖν ὅσια: trans. Edelstein 1998, vol. 2, 126, 164; the inscription does not survive, but is quoted by Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Animal Food* 2.19; on this text, Thomas 2007, 213.
10 *Pax tibi sit, quicumque dei penetralia Christi / pectore pacifico candidus ingrederis*: Paulinus, *Epistulae* 32.12, trans. Trout 1999, 172. A similar inscription is recorded to

have appeared over the doorway into the sixth-century Church of St. Martin at Tours in France, composed by Martin of Braga: "Whoever you are who are about to enter the church of God with a pure mind, you enter to ask for pardon for your recent sins. You must not hesitate in faith. What you seek you get if you ask with a pure heart": see Kendall 1998, 36, with previous bibliography.

11 *Si malum est et turpe cum sordidis minibus ad altare accedere, quantum peius est in animam sordidam corpus et sanguinem Christi suscipere*: Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 229.4, ed. Morin 1953, 908; trans. Mueller 1973, 176; also Bailey 2016, 53.

12 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carmina dogmatica* 4 ("On the Cosmos"), *PG* 37, 423.

13 *LSJ* s.v. δέρκομαι, I.1.

14 Of course, this was not a new interest, but one inherited from classical antiquity: see Squire 2015b.

15 *AG* 9.738; see Squire 2010a, especially 607. On Julian of Egypt, Hartigan 1975; Schulte 1990. The term also appears in another epigram on Myron's cow, where it is used to emphasize the lifelike appearance of the bronze cow, which is perceived to be its mother (ματέρα δερκόμενος): *AG* 9.733.

16 On the issue of sight and touch more broadly in the ancient and Byzantine worlds, recently Betancourt 2016b, 2016c; Platt and Squire 2017b.

17 *AG* 3.8; see Demoen 1988. Odysseus's visit to the underworld is described by Homer, *Odyssey* 11.152.

18 *AG* 7.4, lines 3–4, trans. Paton 1917a, 5, slightly adapted: εἰ δ᾽ὀλίγη γεγαυῖα τόσον χάδεν ἀνέρα νῆσος, μὴ τόδε θαμβήσῃς, ὦ ξένε, δερκόμενος. This was one of several poems on the popular theme of Homer's tomb, *AG* 7.1–7.

19 This late antique tendency to use the verb δέρκομαι to refer to the sight of an object or monument would seem to imply physical sight, against the suggestion of Brubaker and Haldon 2011, 230–2, who suggest that the inscription refers to spiritual (rather than physical) sight.

20 Schick 1995, 180–219; Ognibene 2002; Duval 2003a, 111–14; Brubaker and Haldon 2011, 230–4. The role of the iconoclastic edict of the caliph Yazid II, which some have connected to episodes of iconoclastic damage in the region, is much-debated: recently, Bowersock 2006, 103–5, 109–11; Flood 2012; Schick 2015; Reynolds 2017; Sahner 2017. On the scrambling of figural iconography in synagogues, Fine 2000.

21 Suggested by Maguire 2012, 39–41; also Talgam 2014, 396–8. On epigraphic engagement between Christians and Muslims in the period more broadly, Leatherbury Forthcoming B.

22 The church is dated to 574 CE by inscription: Mahamid 2003; Feissel and Gatier 2005, no. 555; Di Segni 2006, 587–8; *SEG* 53–1884.

23 The term is also used by the Church Fathers, e.g. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 4.45. Closer to the date of the inscription at al-Rashidiyah, Paul the Silentiary uses the term in his ekphrasis of Hagia Sophia: discussed by Macrides and Magdalino 1988, 60.

24 This inscription fits nicely into our broader picture of the debate over the place of images in religious worship in the sixth century, a discussion with even earlier roots: for a good synthetic discussion, focused on images of angels, Peers 2001, 89–103.

25 E.g. Scheid 2003, 97–8: "Prayer was closely linked to ritual. It was an indispensible element in ritual and – vice versa – there was no praying without ritual. Prayers were recited while a celebrant performed the prescribed actions. . . . Inseparable from action, prayer was superimposed upon it; it said in words what the body of the celebrant conveyed by its actions."

26 For example, des Places 1969, 153–70; Aubriot-Sévin 1992; Pulleyn 1997, 56–69; Dorival 2000. On prayer in Roman religion, Alderink and Martin 1997; Rüpke 2017, 103–4; Hahn 2011; in the context of religious communication, Rüpke 2016, 139–57.

27 On Jewish prayer in late antiquity, Langer and Fine 2005; Stroumsa 2009, 56–83.

28 See the helpful summary of Bitton-Ashkelony 2017; also Chadwick and Brown 1999, who also discuss the gestures of prayer; Perrone 2011. On the overlap between the spheres of prayer and magic, Noegel, Walker, and Wheeler 2003.
29 Bitton-Ashkelony 2017.
30 The period saw an increasing move towards formalization of important prayers that were incorporated into the various liturgies used in the period, including the Eucharistic prayer, which was fixed in the Constantinopolitan liturgy at least by the mid-sixth century as evidenced by a law of the emperor Justinian I: Justinian, *Novellae* 137.6, in Kroll and Schöll 1954, vol. 3, 695–9; discussed by Krueger 2014, 66–105.
31 E.g. van der Horst 1994; Bitton-Ashkelony 2012.
32 Chadwick and Brown 1999, 651; Katz 2013.
33 For example, the influential theory of pure prayer of Evagrius of Pontus, which defined prayer as a journey of the mind (*nous*) towards God, a journey requiring ascetic discipline and, importantly, the emptying of the mind of images or depictions: Stewart 2001; Bitton-Ashkelony 2011, 2012, 330–1.
34 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.7.39.6, ed. le Boulluec 1997, 140–1; on this common definition, which derives from Psalm 140 (141):2, see Bitton-Ashkelony 2017, 10–14.
35 On this distinction, Stewart 2008, 744–6. Historians of religion tend to collapse distinctions between "popular" and "elite" religion, e.g. Bitton-Ashkelony 2005, 1–5.
36 Even anonymous prayers for "one whose name God knows" were sometimes prominently displayed within church interiors, suggesting that the public display function of the texts was still significant despite the concealment of the individual's identity: on anonymous prayers, Babić 1971, 267–270; Russell 1987, 59–60, nn. 151–3; Baumann 1999, 296; Yasin 2009, 148 n. 106; Di Segni 2017.
37 Stewart 2008, 746.
38 Amy Papalexandrou's work on Byzantine inscriptions is foundational here: Papalexandrou 2001, 2007; also Rhoby 2012. On the staging and re-performance of prayer encouraged by earlier (Greek) inscriptions, see especially Day 1994, 2010.
39 Ancient versus modern norms discussed by Baird and Taylor 2011b, 3–4; Stern 2012; Keegan 2014, 4–8; generally, Stern 2018. Certain types of spontaneously inscribed prayers include the corpus of memorial invocations from the baths of Hammat Gader, at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, which were produced by a group of professional stonecarvers based at the site: Di Segni 1997b; these inscriptions appear to be part of a larger set of ritual actions related to prayer, including the tossing of coins into the pools of the bath: Leatherbury Forthcoming A.
40 E.g. Benefiel 2010, 2011; Milnor 2014.
41 Yasin 2015a, 36–60, especially 38, 41, focusing primarily on western sites (Rome, Cimitile/Nola); also Handley 2017.
42 The inscriptions are published in *Fouilles de Delphes* (1929–). Some of these texts were hymns, meant to be sung: Käppel 1992, nos. 42, 45–6; generally see Bulloch 2010, 179.
43 Yasin 2015a, 52. The most-discussed example of Christians writing their faith onto a pagan structure is that of the Parthenon, converted into a church of the Virgin: Orlandos and Vranousis 1973; Kaldellis 2009, 74–80; Xenaki 2016. Other examples include numerous temples in Egypt: on the Greek and Demotic graffiti at the Temple of Isis at Philae, the majority of which appears to have been written by Nubian visitors to the site, some of whom were Christian: Rutherford 1998; Dijkstra 2008; Cruz-Uribe 2016. At Philae, the Christian "conversion" inscription is fairly roughly carved on the exterior of the temple, Bernard 1969, 200; also Leatherbury 2016a, 146. On the Temple of Seti I at Abydos, which appears to have been visited regularly by Christian nuns as early as the seventh century, Westerfeld 2017. On Jewish visitors to the Temple of Pan at El-Kanais in the Eastern Desert, Stern 2013a.
44 On these functions of late antique graffiti especially, Yasin 2015a. On the graffiti at the Holy Sepulchre, Pringle 1993, vol. 3, 69. On the graffiti at Beth Shearim, Stern 2013b.

45 Yasin 2015a. On individual prayer in late antiquity, Bowes 2008; generally on conceptions of individuality in the period, Torrance and Zachhuber 2014.
46 Most recently, Ovadiah and Pietri 2015.
47 Μνησθῇ / Γερμανὸς / στρατιώτης καὶ τὰ τέκνα / καὶ ἡ σύνβιος / αὐτοῦ Σωσιπάτρα: Ovadiah and Pietri 2015, 35, no. 93, fig. 103. Over forty of the inscriptions are framed by *tabulae*, and the vast majority feature some variant of the same formula as is used in the Germanos and Sosipatra inscription.
48 Ovadiah and Pietri 2015, 52–5. Two menorahs and two crosses are preserved in the cave, though one appears to date to the Crusader period.
49 Quote from Yasin 2015a, 49; also Yasin 2009, 143–7; Stern 2012. On the graffiti at the Memoria Apostolorum, Felle 2012.
50 Around eleven of these survive; for summary of the range of opinions about the identity of the Persian visitors to the synagogue, who may been a mix of Persian Jews and authorities, Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 177–81; Fine 2011. On the Dura graffiti generally, Baird 2011; Stern 2012, 2014.
51 These paintings would seem to have been particularly appropriate foci for the attention of Persian visitors, as they depict stories with ancient Persian connections: the story of Mordechai and Haman takes place during the reign of the Achaemenid Persian king Xerxes I, while the tale of Elijah may have been appealing due to its emphasis on resurrection: Noy and Bloedhorn 2004*,* 181; Fine 2011.
52 Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 181–5, Syr111; Fine 2011, 309–11.
53 Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 197–8, Syr119.
54 Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 199–200, Syr121 (on the Elijah painting); also, a second text on the Mordechai painting that appears to act as an expression of devotion: Noy and Bloedhorn 2004, 185–7, Syr112. For a commentary on the identity of the writer, who may not have been Jewish, Fine 2011, 311–12.
55 Fewer than twenty graffiti survive from the Christian baptistery at Dura, and only a small number of these intrude on the figures of the painting: Welles 1967; Stern 2014, 148–9; for several other examples of graffiti incised onto paintings themselves, Yasin 2017. There are more examples from the medieval periods: Plesch 2002; Marinis 2014b.
56 Piccirillo 1993, 297. On the function of the *diakonikon* in late antique churches, see Michel 2008; Mulholland 2014; also the useful review of Mulholland's book by Fiema 2016.
57 +Ἅγιος / ὁ ναὸς σοῦ / θαυμαστὸς / ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ: Welles 1938, 485–6, no. 331A; *SEG* 7–875; Piccirillo 1993, 297, who reads the two inscriptions as if they were one; Felle 2006, no. 79. The same psalm is quoted on the pavements of several other extant Christian structures, including the early seventh-century Church of Prophet Elijah at Madaba, where it appears in a *tabula ansata* at the entrance to the church: see Piccirillo 1993, 124–5; *SEG* 44–1406; Felle 2006, no. 87; as well as in a church at Abu Baraqeh in Gaza, where it appears in front of the sanctuary: Piccirillo 2007, 179 fig. 114; *SEG* 58–1757. For the third, in an unpublished church at Horvat Barod, Di Segni 2017, 72, Table 4.1. During the period of Iconoclasm, the text was put up around the curve of the triumphal arch of the church of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople: Felle 2006, no. 506.
58 The term is found in many inscriptions in the eastern Mediterranean: Baumann 1999, 373, provides a list of some examples.
59 *Non dixit: templum sanctum tuum, mirabile in columnis, mirabile in marmoribus, mirabile in tectis auratis; sed mirabile in iustitia*: Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 64.8, Dekkers and Fraipont 1990. On the *topos* of wonder, see Chapter 4.
60 + Κλῖνον, Κύριε, τὸ οὖς [σ]οῦ, καὶ ἐπάκουσόν μου ὅτι πτωχὸς καὶ πέν[ης εἰμί. Φ-] ύλα[ξ]ον τὴν ψυχήν μου ὅτι σός εἰμι. Σῶσον τὸν δοῦλον σοῦ, ὁ Θεός, τὸν ἐλπίζοντα ἐπί σε. Ἐλέησον με, Κύριε, ὅτι πρὸς σὲ κε[κρ]άξομαι ὅλην τὴν [ἡ]μέραν. + Εὐδοκίᾳ Θεοῦ συνέστη ἡ διακονία ἐν μη[(νὶ) Ἀρτ]εμισ(ίῳ) ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ιγ΄ἔτ(ει) ζκχ΄: Welles 1938, 485–6, no. 331B; *SEG* 7–875; Piccirillo 1993, 297; Felle 2006, no. 79, who cites this as the sole instance of the psalm extant in an epigraphic context.

61 Crosses were used as punctuation marks in both Greek and Latin inscriptions in the period: Salway 2015, 372; on the verbal and physical effects of these marks on readers, Leatherbury 2016a, 143.

62 Κ(ύρι)ε ὁ Θ(εός) ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν δὸς ζωὴν Ἀναστασίῳ καὶ Θωμᾷ καὶ Θεοδώρᾳ κ(αὶ) Σαλαμανίου ψηφ(οθέτου): *I.Jordanie* 142; Yasin 2009, 116.

63 A "deacon Anastasios," possibly the same man as is mentioned in the central nave inscription, is named in a dedicatory inscription placed in an annex room to the north of the church: *I.Jordanie* 143.

64 The inclusion of Salamanios's name in such a prominent spot in the church, and in such a visible prayer, is striking, as mosaicists' names (sometimes referred to as "signatures") are more often placed in subsidiary spaces: on signatures, Donderer 1989. Another dedicatory inscription that combines donors and mosaicists appears on the floor of the Church of St. John the Baptist at Oum Hartaïne: Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 196–7; Yasin 2009, 147–8.

65 E.g. Maguire 1987a.

66 Outer circle:

> [Ἐπὶ τοῦ] ἁγιω(τάτου) (καὶ) μακ̣α̣[ριω(τάτου) Θε]ωδόρ̣ο̣[υ
> ἀρχ]ιεπισκ̣[(όπου) ἐψηφώθ]η̣ τοῦ ἁγίου [τόπου το]ῦ μάρ[τυ]ρος Ἰω[άν]νου.

Inner circle:

> [Ἐλέ]ισον, Κ(ύρι)ε Θ(εό)ς, τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰω̣[άν]νου· Ἀγώ[σ]τ̣ῳ μη[νὶ? --- δ]
> ευτευρα(ρίου) [χρ]όνον ἐ[νδεκάτ?]ης ἰν[δ(ικτιῶνος) ---].

On both texts, Gatier 1998, no. 81; *SEG* 48–1938.

67 Gatier 1998, no. 81.

68 On the striking epigraphic transformation of "salvation" inscriptions from Roman texts that request salvation of the emperor into Christian and Jewish texts of personal salvation, Moralee 2004.

69 Welles 1938, 482, no. 314; Piccirillo 1981*,* 38–41, 1993, 288–9; Schick 1995, 317–18.

70 *Martyribus medicis populo spes certa salutis venit* . . . : *ICUR* 2, 71, 134, 152, 353, 439; *ILCV* 1, no. 1784; see also the discussion of this inscription in Chapter 2.

71 Ὅστις πρόσεισι / [ὧδε] βάϊαν ἁγνὴν ἔχοι / [μνήμην φ]υλάττων / [τῶν ἁγ]ιω(τά)των μαρτύρω/[ν], δούς τε δόξαν / τῷ θεῷ κατ' ἀξίαν: Di Segni 2006, 586–7. On the church, Piccirillo 1993, 129–31. Feissel and Gatier 2008, no. 571, reads the first two lines as: "May whoever enters here have a pure heart" ([κα]ρδίαν ἁγνὴν ἔχοι), which would rid the text of any specific ritual implication.

72 Di Segni 2006, 586–7.

73 For example, palm trees separate the martyrs who process on the sixth-century nave wall mosaics of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna: Deichmann 1974, 144–6; Dresken-Weiland 2016, 195–6. This kind of scene may have had a resonance with apocalyptic traditions, as described in Revelation 7:9–10, where the martyrs stand in front of the throne of God, wearing white and carrying palm fronds (φοίνικες).

74 Matthew 21:8 ("the branches from trees," κλάδους ἀπὸ τῶν δένδρων); Mark 11:8 ("cut branches from the fields," στιβάδας κόψαντες ἐκ τῶν ἀγρῶν); and the closest account, John 12:13 ("the branches of palm trees," τὰ βαΐα τῶν φοινίκων). The account of Luke 19:28–44 does not mention any branches.

75 *Itinerarium Egeriae* 31.2–4, trans. Wilkinson 1971, 133.

76 Piccirillo 1993*,* 296; Baumann 1999*,* 208–10.

77 On the church, *Liber Pontificalis* 49.1, trans. Davis 1989, 42; Hillner 2007, 236–7, 242; Kalas 2013.

78 *ICUR* 2, 436, 115; *ILCV* 1, no. 1785; Ihm 1960, 154–6; Cecchelli 1991, who (probably incorrectly) disputes the reference to "Valila." On the apse mosaic, Matthiae 1967, vol. 1*,* 131–4; Kalas 2013, 293–6, translation of inscription at 293. For a drawing of the apse image, Ciampini 1693*,* vol. 1, Taf. LXXVI; reproduced in Ihm 1960, pl. VIII, 1.

79 The text crops the biblical passage, leaving out the additional subjects "young men and women, old men with children" (*iuvenes et virgines, senes cum pueris*): *ICUR* 2, 435, 108; *ILCV* 1, no. 1775; Felle 2006, no. 651. On the church, see especially Brubaker 1997, 61; Cassanelli 2013.

80 This psalm was part of the everyday cathedral morning office or service in Rome in the mid-fifth century, according to a commentary on the psalm written c. 470 by Arnobius the Younger, *Commentary on Psalm 148*, *PL* 53, 566; Taft 1984, 143, 204.

81 *[Q]uo quisquis gradiens et C(h)r(istu)m pronus ador[an]s / effusasq[ue] preces mittat ad aethra sua*: see *ICUR* 2, 1, 148, 425; *ILCV* 1, no. 1786a; Ihm 1960, 144–5; Mackie 2003, 212–30, 333 n. 5; translation based on Thunø 2011a, 290–1. On the mosaics, Matthiae 1967, vol. 1, 191–7.

82 Ferrua 1942; recently translated and commented upon by Trout 2015. These epigrams have accrued a large bibliography: see especially Pietri 1976, vol. 1, 529–57; Ferrua 1985; Spera 1994; Brent 1995, 368–97; Nicolai 1999; Curran 2000, 146–57; Grig 2004, 127–35; Trout 2005; Thacker 2007; Sághy 2012; Thunø 2015, 172–81; Sághy 2016.

83 Thunø 2015; following the work of Diefenbach 2007. On the ceremonial movements encouraged by the inscriptions, Dal Santo 2015.

84 Yasin 2009, 149.

85 Ἐπὶ τοῦ εὐλαβ(εστάτου) πρεσβυτέρ(ου) / Διονυσίου ἀνεναιώθη ὁ / ἅγιος ἐκ θεμελίων καί ἐ/κεντήθη. Πάντες οἱ εἰσι/όντες εὔξασθαι ὑπὲρ / αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ οἴκου αὐτοῦ: Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1987a, 199–200; *SEG* 56–605 bis A; discussed by Yasin 2009, 132. Other examples of mosaic prayers at entrances include the inscription of the first phase of the Memorial of Moses at Mount Nebo, built in the second half of the fourth century: "You entering, I beseech you . . . pray for . . . " (Ἱκετεύω σε τὸν εἰσίο[ντα . . . αιτ]ήσασθαι ὑπέρ.): Saller 1934, 1941, vol. 1, 260–2, no. VII, pl. 117, 2; *SEG* 8–324; *I.Jordanie* 71, pl. XVIII, 61; Di Segni 1998, 426–7, no. 1. Other texts placed at different points of the church also ask the reader to "bear in mind" the prayers for the donors: these include inscriptions from the Basilica of Ss. Silvanus and Fortunatus at Sbeitla (also called "Basilica IV") in modern-day Tunisia, dated to the late fourth century: *CIL* 9, 23230–3; Duval 1982, vol. 1, 75–9, Duval 1956, 266, 1982, vol. 1, 75–9; Yasin 2009, 226–8. Also a similar text in the Chlef Basilica, in Algeria, dated to the 320s or 330s: Caillet 1987a, 146–50; Yasin 2009, 140–2.

86 Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1987a, 199–200; Rousset 2006, 428–9; *SEG* 56–605 bis B–D.

87 In northern Italian churches, the number of "feet" donated, e.g. examples in Caillet 1993; for other examples from the Levant, Merrony 2013.

88 [Z]ώσιμος ὑπὲ/ρ εὐ[χ]ῆς ἑαυ/τοῦ καὶ παντὸς τοῦ / οἴκο[υ αὐ]τοῦ: Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1987a, 199–200; *SEG* 56–605 bis B; generally on votive inscriptions in churches, Yasin 2009, 110–50; for vows in synagogues, Satlow 2005.

89 On the synagogue mosaics, see Hachlili 1998, 198–204; on the inscriptions, see the discussion in Chapter 2.

90 On the deictic in classical antiquity, Day 2007, especially 37, 2010; Bruss 2010, 388–9. From the Hellenistic period onwards, poets often included deictic markers in epigrams that were never meant for inscription onto monuments: Bing 1998, 29, 34–5.

91 Kitzinger 1951a, 100–1; Pelekanides 1940. For an extended discussion of this inscription, see Chapter 4.

92 On the creation of a spatial network of monuments through inscriptions, Bing 1998, 34–5; Yasin 2009, 110; Ma 2013.

93 τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο τῆς ψηφόσ[εω]ς, as in the Church of St. Lot at Dayr ʿAin ʿAbata in Jordan, renovated in 691: Politis 2012, 175–7; also Baumann 1999, 282–3.

94 τῷ ἔργῳ τούτῳ, as in the church at Houedjit Halaoua in Syria, dated to 471 by inscription: Abu Assaf 1972; Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 147–9; *SEG* 40–1380 bis. The variant ἐνθάδε is also found, as in the Baptistery of the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo in Jordan, built in 530/531, where an inscription asks the reader to "remember the clerics here" (μνήσθητι τῶν ἐνθάδε κληρικῶν): *I.Jordanie* no. 75; *SEG* 27–1020; Di Segni 1998, 430–1, no. 7.

95 τὸν τόπον τοῦτον, as in the West Church at Mamshit (fifth century) in Israel: Negev 1981, no. 81; SEG 31–1411; or *h(unc) l(ocum)*, as in the South Church at Brescia in Italy (late fourth or early fifth century): *CIL* 5, 4842; *ILCV* 1, 1866; Caillet 1993, no. 13, 4. Generally, also Baumann 1999, Appendix 13 (τόπος οὗτος).

96 τὰ ὅδε, as in the chapel at Qam (sixth century) in Jordan: Puech 2003, 323–4.

97 In North African churches, funerary inscriptions performed similar locating and linking functions, informing visitors that "in this place" is buried, or "here rests," the deceased: *In hoc loco*, as in the funerary and martyrial inscription of the "glorious and blessed martyrs" (*gloriosissimis beatissimis martyribus*) in the Basilica of the Martyrs at Haïdra, dated to the mid-sixth century: Duval 1982, vol. 1, 108; Yasin 2009, 222–6; or *Hic requiescit,* as in the funerary inscription of Reparatus in the Cathedral at Orléansville, dated to 475: *ILCV* 1104; *CIL* 8, 9709; Caillet 1987a, 155–6; discussed in Chapter 3. Generally, also see the remarks of Yasin 2005.

98 On the church and its mosaics, Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 59–60; Madden 2014, no. 258–60, 176–80. On the inscriptions, Tzaferis 1987.

99 Tzaferis 1987, 41 no. 4; *SEG* 37–1513.

100 [---] Δο/μνίνα θ/υγατρί αὐ/τες, Κύριε / μνήσκο[υ ---]: Tzaferis 1987, 46 no. 10; *SEG* 37–1519. The other fragmentary invocation uses the same language of remembrance, asking God to "remember your servant, Timotheos": Tzaferis 1987, 47 no. 11; *SEG* 37–1520.

101 Tzaferis 1987, 44 no. 7 (Julianos and Paul), 47 no. 13 (Ammanos and Euthalios); *SEG* 37–1516, 37–1522. Similar remembrance inscriptions featured in a fifth-century church at Carmiel (Horvat Bata): Tzaferis 1992.

102 Jacques 1997; Millar 2006, 107–9.

103 Tzaferis 1987, 42 no. 5; *SEG* 37–1514.

104 Κ(ύρι)ε μνήσκου / Αἰώνι καὶ Σα/μάκωνος / καὶ Ἀρίωνος: Tzaferis 1987, 47 no. 12; *SEG* 37–1521. These individuals may be the same as those named in the main dedication of the church, in the nave.

105 Εἷς Θεός / ὁ βοηθών / Οὐαλεν/τίνον κα/ρποφορή/σανταν / ἔναν: Tzaferis 1987, 46 no. 9; *SEG* 37–1518.

106 The phrase "one God" (εἷς Θεός) has a basis at least as old as the New Testament, e.g. 1 Cor 8:6, "but for us there is one God the Father." On the formula, which marks out monotheistic faith and may have had apotropaic meanings for certain communities, see especially Peterson 1926; Di Segni 1994b, 2017, 79–80.

107 Καὶ ἐπὶ Εἰσακίου περιοδευτοῦ ἐψηφώθη / ἡ ἐκλησία. / Εἰρήνη <εἰς τὴν> εἴσοδόν σου καὶ τὴν ἔξοδόν σου: Tzaferis 1987, 43 no. 6; *SEG* 37–1515. Other programs that present versions of the same text are the church at Khirbat al-Samra in Israel, dated to the fourth through sixth centuries, which presents two inscriptions focused on the peaceful character of the space: Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987*,* 98–9, no. 168; *SEG* 37–1499B; Tzaferis 1993; *SEG* 43–1064. A mosaic inscription at the fifth or sixth-century Imhoff Monastery at Beth Shean (Scythopolis) reproduces a similar plea for peace: Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 32 no. 23, with previous bibliography; as does the inscription in the doorway into the north aisle of the Church of St. Christopher at Qabr Hiram in Lebanon, dated to c. 575, now on display in the Musée du Louvre: Donceel-Voûte 1988a, 412–19, with previous bibliography. Di Segni identifies four other instances of similar texts, three from buildings at Caesarea (the public revenue office, the *praetorium*, and a mansion), and one from a public building at the site of Tel Malhata in the Negev: Eldar and Nahlieli 1982.

108 The kiss of peace is attested in the late fifth century *Life of St. Marcian the Oeconomos*: *PG* 114, 429–56. On this kiss, Taft 1982, 2008, 96–8, 110–14.

109 *Sem/per / pax*: *CIL* 8, 9712; Caillet 1987a, 153. For an expanded discussion of this church and its inscriptions, including this one, see Chapter 3.

110 As in the lengthy Hebrew inscription from the pavement of the synagogue at ʿEn Gedi, dated from the fifth to seventh centuries: Levine 1981. In the Gerasa synagogue,

a similar text was inscribed in both Hebrew and Greek, the latter version of which read, in two columns: "[. . .] Holy Place. Amen. Sela. Peace to the synagogue," [---] ἁγιοτάτῳ τόπῳ. Ἀμήν. Σέλα. Ε<ἰ>ρήνη τῇ Συναγωγῇ: Welles 1938, 473, nos. 285 (Greek), 287 (Hebrew); Dvorjetski 2005. Another example survives from the synagogue at Issfiya (Huseifa): Avi-Yonah and Makhouly 1933.

111 Di Segni 2017, who argues that particular types of biblical texts appear in Christian contexts alone (versus Jewish ones); from her abbreviated catalog, it is also clear that inscriptions in monastic contexts quote from a wider range of biblical passages, especially the psalms. The key catalog for this material is that of Felle 2006, who presents over eight hundred inscriptions from the third to eighth century that cite biblical passages.

112 On these, see the discussion in Chapter 5.

113 On doorways, Yasin 2009, 194–7. The issue of entrance inscriptions has a large bibliography: Deichmann 1983, 94–6, 105–6, who cites simple formulae dedicating structures to God, especially on doorways in Syria, or occasionally more complicated texts which speak either in the voice of God (biblical quotations such as Exodus 3.6.14, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham . . ." which appears on a doorway at Sinai) or in the personified voice of the door, i.e. John 10:9, "I am the door . . ." as on the doorway of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople; Spieser 1995, trans. Spieser 2001b; Gerstel 2006; Agosti 2017b; and on domestic lintels, Bowes 2011. On the use of inscriptions to protect or guard, Weinryb 2011; Rhoby 2016a.

114 See e.g. Stewart 2011; Krueger 2014. The psalms were frequently quoted in funerary inscriptions as well: Felle 2014.

115 Krueger 2014, 17, who cites a passage written by Patriarch Athanasios of Alexandria, *Letter to Markellinos*: "These words become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul, and thus affected, he might recite them," trans. Krueger 2014, 17.

116 On the power of the psalms, see Parpulov 2010; Stroumsa 2016.

117 Among the many works on these inscriptions, Fine 2005a, 92, for whom the Rehov inscription reflects "the high level of Jewish textuality in Byzantine Palestine"; Fine 2005b; Talgam 2014, 329–32; Fraade 2014; more generally, Foerster 1981.

118 *Introibo, Domine, in domum tuam et adorabo ad templum sanctum tuum in timore tuo*: Felle 2006, no. 648; the inscription is not extant, but was recorded by Onofrio Panvinio in the sixteenth century. The chapel dates to 461–468: Johnson 1995; Mackie 2003, 195–211, with further bibliography. The foundation of the chapel is recorded in the *Liber Pontificalis* 48, trans. Davis 1989, 38–9. The reference to the "holy" character of the church or the synagogue is frequently found in inscriptions, occasionally as a kind of label: see e.g. the Gerasa synagogue inscription, *supra* n. 110. On developing perceptions of the synagogue as a sacred space, Branham 1992; Fine 1997.

119 Mackie 2003, 205–6.

120 Felle 2006 records sixty-eight examples, although around forty of these are lintel inscriptions from houses, mostly in Syria. Di Segni 2017, Table 4.1, cites a total of seventeen examples from the region of modern Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and southern Syria, a number of which come from buildings in southern Syria (the Golan, the Hauran) of unclear character, which may have been houses or churches. See also Feissel 1997, 290–2, 297–8 n. 22; Vriezen 1998, 249–50; Bowes 2011, 180–1; Di Segni 2017; Agosti Forthcoming, who points out several examples that also emphasize the conversion of previously pagan spaces into Christian ones. On St. Peter in Gallicantu, Vincent 1930, 235. Other examples include the Viri Galilei Church, also in Jerusalem: Avi-Yonah 1932, 165; the pavement of a room at the Monastery of Tell Basul (fourth to seventh century): Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 137–8, no. 235, with previous bibliography; and the Chapel of Elias, Maria, and Soreg at Gerasa (seventh century): Piccirillo 1993, 296; *I.Jordanie* 34, no. 6.

121 As in a funerary chapel at Tel Malhata in the Negev, generally dated to the fourth to sixth century: Eldar and Nahlieli 1982.
122 As in the church at Jubayhah: al Hussein 1976, 15; Piccirillo 1993, 314; *I.Jordanie* 6.
123 Bagatti 1955–1956, no. 18; Milik 1960, 552–4, fig. 1, pl. 29; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 81–3, no. 120. On the mosaics of the church, also Massara 2013. Also on the pavement of a monastery at Siyar el-Ghanam, dated to the sixth century: Corbo 1955, 19–56, pls. 12–17; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 99–100, no. 169.
124 Von Oppenheim and Lucas 1905, 37; Vriezen 1998, 249–50; also cited by Di Segni 2017, Table 4.1.
125 Von Oppenheim and Lucas 1905, 33, 37, 40, 42–4; Vriezen 1998, 250–1.
126 The largest number of these are also from churches in Syria: Feissel 1997, 290–1, 294, who identified thirty-one inscriptions; Vriezen 1998, 248–51; Felle 2006, who identified fifty-two inscriptions. Examples also occur in Palestine: Gregg and Urman 1996, 276–7, no. 236.
127 Ševčenko 1966, at 262; on the inscriptions of the monastery, also Leatherbury 2016a.
128 Including in a church at Bethlehem: Avi-Yonah 1932, 150, no. 33, 2; immediately inside the doorway from the narthex to the atrium at Church A, Magen (sixth century): Tzaferis 1985, no. 1; *SEG* 35–1549; Felle 2006, no. 187. Also immediately inside the entrance to the nave of the Church on the Acropolis at Maʿin in Jordan, dated to 719/720: Piccirillo 1989a, 232; *I.Jordanie* 158; Piccirillo 1993, 201; Felle 2006, no. 74; and in the portico of the church at Aladja Kislé (Myra) in modern Turkey, dated to the fifth century: Grégoire 1968, 98 n. 288; in the west side of the nave in the basilica *intra muros* at Hagioi Saranda in Illyria: dated to the late fifth or early sixth century: Pelekanides and Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1974, 60, pl. 21D; in a church at Hagioi Pente in Cyprus: Michaelides 2005; and in the narthex at the entrance of the Basilica of St. Anastasia at Arkasas on the island of Karpathos (sixth century): Pelekanides 1974, 59–60, no. 17. Di Segni 2017, Table 4.1, cites a total of nineteen examples from modern Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and southern Syria, but a number of these are from buildings of uncertain character.
129 Λίθον ἀστράπτοντα Θ(εο)ῦ χάριν ἔνθα κ(αὶ) ἔνθα . . . αὕτη ἡ πύλη τοῦ Κ(υρίο)υ· δίκαιοι εἰσελθόντων: Kitzinger 1951a, 86–7; and Agosti 2011–2012, 267–8; see also the discussion in Chapter 4.
130 Ἀνοίξατέ μοι πύλας δικαιοσύνης εἰσελθὼν ἐν αὐταῖς ἐξομολογήσομαι τῷ Κ(υρί)ῳ: Figueras 1996, 274–5, no. 8; *SEG* 46–1924; Felle 2006, 172. Another example is present at a church in Bethlehem: *SEG* 8–235; Felle 2006, no. 160.
131 On the architecture of the church, Netzer 1990, 166–8.
132 The plans of the buildings around the church are not known, but there are signs of the courtyard immediately to the south of the church, perhaps suggesting that the constraints of the urban fabric of the site (part of the "lower town") influenced the irregular plan of the church: Netzer 1990, 168.
133 On the bench, Netzer 1990, 166. The function of the bench is clear, as an additional seating area, but the reason for its presence in the building is unknown, perhaps suggesting the frequent extra-liturgical use of the church for study (as is the case in late antique synagogues with similar benches), or to compensate for the small area of the church. One piece of evidence in support of the former is the number of donors named in the dedicatory inscriptions of the church who have Semitic names, and who appear, based on the epigraphic evidence, to have formed a close-knit group: Di Segni 1990, 181–2.
134 The Greek text is given by Di Segni 1990, 182–3, no. 3, with previous bibliography; also *SEG* 40–1472; Felle 2006, no. 163:

+ Αὕτη ἡ πύλη
τοῦ Κ(υρίο)υ εἰσελεύ-
σοντε ἐν αὐτῇ
δίκαιοι +

Κ(ύρι)ε Ὑ(ιὸ)ς Χ(ριστό)ς, μνήσθητι
τὸν δοῦλόν σο-
υ Ἀναὴλ καὶ
Σαπρίκα. +

135 Pointed out by Di Segni 1990, 182–3.
136 Caraher 2003, 146–7.
137 Kendall 1998.
138 Kendall 1998, 38–40.
139 *Una fides trino sub nomine quae colit unum / unanimes trino suscipit introitu*: Paulinus, *Epistula* 32, trans. Goldschmidt 1940, 44.
140 Kendall 1998, 48.
141 Krueger 2014, 111.
142 See Krueger 2014.
143 On Horvat Hesheq, Di Segni 1993, 70, no. 5; *SEG* 40–1990; Felle 2006, no. 231.
144 On the Maʿin inscription, see *supra* n. 128.
145 *SEG* 37–1987; Piccirillo 1989a, 280–1, 1993, 234; Piccirillo and Alliata 1994, 260, no. 16; Felle 2006, no. 83.
146 Jerome, *Epistula* 108 (*Ad Eustochium*), 9, *CSEL* 55, 315, who quotes the psalm in a passage describing the pilgrimage of Paula the Younger to Jerusalem.
147 On the power of Jerusalem as a concept, Ousterhout 2012, 281–306.
148 This trend towards systematic theological interpretations of every part of the architecture of the church is evident in the sixth-century Syriac "Hymn on the Cathedral of Edessa," ed. and trans. Goussen 1925; portions trans. Mango 1972*,* 57–60. Symbolic interpretations are developed further in the eighth century, as attested in the writings of the patriarch Germanos: Ousterhout 1998, 98–9; Doig 2008, 80–3.
149 [+ --- Ὡς ἀγαπη]τὰ τὰ σκ[ηνώματά σου, Κύριε τ]ῶν δυνά[με]ων. Ἐπιποθεῖ κα[ὶ ἐκλείπει ἡ] ψυχή μου εἰς τὰς αὐλὰς [τοῦ Κυρίου +]: Gatier 2007, 173–4; on the five-aisled basilica church, which may have been built as a kind of local imitation of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Menninga 2004. The psalm is also quoted in a mosaic inscription from the narthex pavement of an early sixth-century church at Lychnidos (modern Lin in Albania): Felle 2006, no. 566, with previous bibliography.
150 On Jewish uses of the psalm, which has a striking military aspect, Hezser 2016, who uses the sun symbolism of the psalm to consider the potential meanings of images of the sun/Sol in late antique synagogue mosaics.
151 As recorded by Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius*, ed. Schwartz 1939, 53.15. Cyril's text was written almost one hundred years after Eudocia's death, which suggests that the narrative of her response may be apocryphal, but still points to the use of Old Testament passages in the period for responding to, and thinking about, architecture.
152 See Milwright 2016, especially 49–82.
153 Flood 2001; also Moor 2013, 101–4.
154 On these, Flood 2001, 247–54; also Rabbat 2003.
155 Seven inscriptions survive from the site: Moor 2013, inscription quoted at 93–4.
156 Line 2 of the inscription; see Moor 2013, 85–6, 90–2; also Hoyland 1997.
157 Moor 2013, 103–4.
158 On the love of the fragment in late antiquity, including poems such as *centones* made up of fragments of other poems, see Chapter 2.
159 On earlier precedents for this emphasis, Meyer 2007.
160 <Ἐ>γράφη ἐν μηνὶ Μαρτίῳ χρόνον ὀγδόης ἰν(δικτιῶνος) τοῦ [ἔτους] ΦΚΘ΄: Avi-Yonah 1933, 69; Mittman 1970; Piccirillo 1989a, 76–7, 1993, 313. The same verb is used in the dedicatory inscription of the Church of St. Basil, also at Rihab, dated to 594 CE: Avi-Yonah 1933, 69; Piccirillo 1989a, 70–2, pls. 54–7, 1993, 311.
161 Abu Assaf 1972; Donceel-Voûte 1988a*,* 147.

162 On the difficulty of distinguishing between artists and patrons in the inscription, Assimakopoulou-Atzaka 1987b.
163 Avi-Yonah 1932, nos. 300–2; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987, 130–1, no. 219.
164 For example, the dedicatory inscription of the Church of St. George at Mumsiyye (472 or 486/487 CE), carved onto a stone block, which concludes: "Written [ἐγράφη] in the month of December (?)": Gregg and Urman, 213–14, no. 174.
165 On artists' signatures, which typically state generically that an individual or a workshop "made" the work, Donderer 1989; Pallarès 1991; Dunbabin 1999a, 269–78.
166 The inscription is now installed in the baptistery of the sixth-century basilica, on site: Caillet 1993, 311–12, cat. 32,10, with previous bibliography.
167 See especially Duval 1975, 193–5, no. 200 A–C; Duval 1982, vol. 1, 105–15, nos. 51–2; Frend 2004, especially 261, 266; Yasin 2009, 222–6; Baratte, Bejaoui, Duval, and Golvin 2011, 34, 60 fig. 65 (color restoration drawing of the inscription).
168 Edited by Hirsch-Luipold et al. 2005; also Seddon 2005. On this work, Squire 2011, 122–6; Squire and Grethlein 2014.
169 *Tabula Cebetis* 3.1, trans. from Squire 2011, 122–3.
170 On the role of Greek and Roman *paideia* in early Christianity, Stroumsa 2016.
171 Seager 1981, 181; Kraabel 1983, 189; Feldman 1996, 64–6, fig. 3.14; Hachlili 1998, 410.

Conclusion

Reading and seeing faith

In their sacred spaces, Christians, Jews, and Muslims encountered words writ large and small on walls, floors, and ceilings. Not all churches, synagogues, and mosques featured inscriptions prominently, and when they did, some visitors surely did not read them, walking past, under, or over these inscriptions without much thought. However, some, perhaps many, engaged with the texts, reading one word here, a phrase there, or the entire thing. These inscriptions communicated through their materials, drawing viewers' eyes through their rich colors, sometimes proclaiming their holy character through their stone, glass, and painted materialities. Presented within frames with classical as well as Christian, Jewish, and Muslim valences, some of whose formal histories reached deep into the Greek past, the texts spoke about cultural and religious affiliations through their very forms and arrangements. Once these verbal images converted viewers into readers, their words drew on the classical rhetorical strategies of ekphrasis as well as quotations from great works of Greek and Roman literature, encouraging visitors to move around sacred interiors in particular ways, reflect on the character of spaces, visit particular parts of buildings, and respond in directed but personal ways to their experiences. When paired with the rich range of figural and other images that appeared in the same buildings, especially with narrative and iconic images of biblical events and figures, inscriptions served to vivify and dramatize images and allow characters to speak, collapsing biblical and contemporary (late antique) time and space to allow audiences direct access to sacred history and eschatological future. As was appropriate for their settings in buildings of worship, the texts considered here often fixed prayers made by donors, encouraging re-performance and ritual motion, and quoting biblical passages to emphasize the sacred and communal character of their spaces.

By examining the verbal and the visual aspects of late antique inscriptions from religious contexts, it becomes clear that these features of the texts were viewed as conjoined by artists, patrons, and reader-viewers. This essential link between the verbal and visual characters of inscribed texts was all the more important in the period. While Roman inscriptions also spoke through their monumental, standardized appearances, the visual range of late antique texts was much wider, allowing patrons and artists to manipulate inscriptions to convey messages tailored to different communities of different faiths. Although the appearances of

inscriptions became more flexible, certain tendencies are visible across confessional boundaries, including a delight in the colors, materials, frames, and layouts of texts, features grounded in Roman traditions of writing and inscribing. Especially in texts written into public Christian contexts, many concepts and specific phrases also were retained from Graeco-Roman epigraphic and literary traditions, from quotations of the works of Homer to dedicatory phrases, which were then creatively adapted for their new contexts. In these new Christian interiors at least, inscriptions performed a much wider range of functions than they had in the interiors of temples (dedicatory, prayer, ekphrasis, etc.), and were seen as multifaceted expressions of piety that at the same time played with deeply rooted, and deeply felt, ideas about materials, images, and the relationship between things read and things seen.

As a group, the various ways that late antique inscriptions worked for their readers and viewers argue for a shift in our understanding of the interiors of late antique churches, synagogues, and mosques. Scholars have long argued that these sacred interiors were designed to encourage a mental journey towards the divine, their decorative programs guiding viewers to think on aspects of divinity that were not considered visible to the human eye, at least under normal circumstances. In the church, colorful and golden mosaics and images of revelatory visions seem to have been intended to open a tear in the fabric of the secular world, creating a reflection, if a pale one, of the heavenly kingdom on earth, and encouraging a particular kind of imaginative viewing in order to grant Christians a glimpse of their future salvations.[1] Some art historians, including Bissera Pentcheva, have argued that these spaces were not only reflections, but were animated through their shimmering gold and liquid marble skins, pushing viewers to recognize the presence of the divine in matter.[2] These interpretations are typically grounded in texts (e.g. ekphraseis) written about the buildings, or in some cases, in texts such as hymns or prayers performed within them.

When we add the inscriptions back into the buildings, our view of their character becomes more nuanced. Some texts appear to confirm these now-standard interpretations: for example, the group of inscriptions from churches in Rome, discussed in Chapter 2, which emphasizes the brilliant metallic mosaic tesserae of which they themselves are made. However, even these explicitly recognize the possibility of divergent modes of viewing, asking readers to suppress the physical sense of sight, distracted by the splendor of the building, and instead to use the eyes of faith. While inscriptions were designed to transmit messages on behalf of their authors (for example, *tituli* inscriptions, some of which provide biblical frames for their images), their exuberant verbal and visual strategies seem designed not only to attract readers, but to convince those who needed a bit of extra convincing, and occasionally even to encourage dialogue and debate (as in the case of the dialogue inscriptions considered in Chapter 4). By encouraging readers to stay engaged as they moved around sacred interiors, sometimes driven physically by the circular layout of texts or by the deictics that invite them to perform particular actions in different spots, and by turning static images into animated ones, late antique building inscriptions demanded as well as cultivated an active readership.[3] Intended

for a number of different audiences, these texts give us a window into a wider range of experiences and encounters than has been acknowledged thus far. Even though they are fossilized responses, or rather prompts to responses preserved in mosaic tesserae or carved stone, the inscriptions ask us to remember that sacred spaces were loud, active ones, full of texts and images that could be read in different ways, but that were always intimately connected to the architectural spaces in which they appear. Importantly, texts in buildings asked one to *do* things – to move, to speak, to look, to act, to think – reminding us that in late antiquity, people in synagogues, churches, and mosques were not meant to be passive receivers, but to be deeply engaged in their own performances of faith.

Of course, due to the extensive corpus of surviving late antique inscriptions from the eastern and western Mediterranean, which numbers in the thousands, many interesting texts have had to be left aside here. Although it is not the goal of this work, it is hoped that a corpus, or perhaps several corpora, of inscriptions from the sacred spaces of the period might be assembled in the future in order to make these texts more accessible to the student or the scholar. As we have been attuned to broad trends across the period, the particulars of the chronologies of some themes and verbal formulae (e.g. those related to types of dedication, for example votive dedication, or to the anonymous donor) have largely been set aside, and would benefit from further study. By embracing a more "global" (Mediterranean) multicultural view, the goal of this work has been to open up a discussion of the function of texts across cultures and geographies, but certain groups of inscriptions would reward closer examination in the form of regional case studies, perhaps following the multi-dimensional approach established in the case studies that open each of the chapters here: for example, inscriptions that are connected to imperial patrons, record the construction or renovation of secular public buildings such as baths, or appear on tombs and tombstones, a sizeable number of which are written in verse. Inscriptions from Christian spaces in particular would reward a more in-depth consideration in the context of the celebration of specific prayers and the liturgy, a context that has been discussed here, albeit briefly. A close focus on scripts used across media – stone, paint, mosaic – as well as punctuation marks might further illuminate the range of formal developments that enabled the transformation of the monumental, controlled capital letters of the Roman period into the serif-laden script of the later Byzantine world.

Returning to the mosaic from Gerasa with which we began this book, we can more clearly see how the congregants and the clergy might have encountered the panel with its dedicatory inscription. Signaling itself as a dedication and as a significant text through its *tabula ansata* frame, the inscription would have come into view as a brilliant red visual object before its words were legible. As readers neared the altar of the Church of Ss. Peter and Paul, they would have begun to read the text, which praises the patron of the church, Anastasios, and his elaborately decorated building, of which the mosaic itself was a part:

> Indeed, each high priest brings very beautiful wonders to the people who inhabit this city and land, wherefore famous Anastasios, teaching faithful

> beliefs of God, built a house to the first of the apostles, Peter and Paul, for to them the Savior gave authority, decorated with ornaments of silver and vividly-colored stones.[4]

This inscription, then, was not merely a static record of patronage; rather, it functioned as an ekphrasis in miniature on the church and its construction, and as a window into the pride in local history that would have been activated for a Gerasene reader, who may even have put the buildings of the city in the company of the famous Lighthouse (*Pharos*) of Alexandria depicted below the text. In the forms of the Egyptian cities of Alexandria and Memphis, the mosaic brings the world to Gerasa, but the inscription also opens up the church to the wider Mediterranean and to a sacred history stretching back to the chief apostle, as well as to bishops who came to Gerasa before Anastasios, rooting the ancient past of the Christian church in local history. Functioning as an image and as a text, Anastasios's inscription at Gerasa is exemplary of the exceptional integration between the verbal and the visual in late antique inscriptions, a powerful relationship that allowed mosaicists, stonecarvers, and painters to produce epigraphic compositions that enlivened sacred interiors, inscriptions that were meant to be read as well as viewed.

Notes

1 A recent example of this interpretation is Schibille 2014.
2 E.g. Pentcheva 2017.
3 The poetry of late antiquity also seems more generally designed to cultivate active readers: see e.g. Pelttari 2014.
4 Evans and Ratliff 2012, 12, no. 1; for further discussion and bibliography, see Chapter 1.

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